

JEEVADHARA

Property of
Graduate Theological Union

SEP 03 1987

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR IN THE BIBLE

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE IN MESOPOTAMIA

K. Luke

THE SECULAR AND THE SACRED IN GENESIS 1-11

K. V. Mathew

THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF THE SACRED AND
SECULAR IN THE PROPHETIC TRADITION

E. C. John

THE SECULAR AS BASIS OF THE SACRED IN WISDOM LITERATURE

R. Vande Walle

THE SACRED IN THE SECULAR

George M. Soares-Prabhu

SACRALIZED SECULARITY IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

R. J. Raja

BOOK REVIEW

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Human Problem

T. Vellilamthadam - F. Wilfred

The Word of God

J. M. Pathrapankal

The Living Christ

Samuel Rayan

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

The Meeting of Religions

John B. Chethimattam

The Fulness of Life

Felix Podimattam - Thomas Kalam

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

K. Luke

Mathew Vellanickal

Lucien Legrand

Joseph Thuruthumaly

J. G. Collison

George M. Soares-Prabhu

George Mangatt

Paul Kalluveettil

K. V. Mathew

Joseph Kallarangat

EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

(Contd on inside back-cover)

JEEVADHARA

The Word of God

THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR IN THE BIBLE

Editor:

J. M. PATHRAPANKAL

Jeevadhara
Kottayam - 686 017
Kerala, India

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	97
The Sacred and the Profane in Mesopotamia <i>K. Luke</i>	101
The Secular and the Sacred in Genesis 1-11 <i>K. V. Mathew</i>	113
The Sacred in the Secular <i>George M. Soares-Prabhu</i>	125
The Complementarity of the Sacred and Secular in the Prophetic Tradition <i>E. C. John</i>	141
The Secular as Basis of the Sacred in Wisdom Literature <i>R. Vande Walle</i>	146
Sacralized Secularity in the Acts of the Apostles <i>R. J. Raja</i>	165
Book Review	182

Editorial

"Do not love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you do not love the Father. Everything that belongs to the world — What the sinful self desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are so proud of — none of this comes from the Father; it all comes from the world." (Jn 2:15-17) It is in these words that the author of the First Letter of John articulated his attitude to the world and warned his readers against the tragedy of endangering the goal and purpose of life in their relation to the world. James writes in his Letter: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wants to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy" (James 4:4). Christian writers, both theologians and spiritual writers, developed much of their theology and spirituality on the basis of these directives.

Ever since Vatican II a new approach is emerging in the Catholic Church by which the Church is seen as placed in the heart of the world, a world which the Church has to love and serve. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which enjoys the interesting distinction of being the only major document to have originated directly from a suggestion made on the floor of the Conciliar Aula itself, is a clear proof of the Church's attitude to the world which Christians are expected to have in our times. In this document one can clearly see a tendency to accentuate the positive in a realistic appraisal of trends and movements at work today in the City of Man. The attitude of the Church to the world is one of joy (*gaudium*) and hope (*spes*). The Church is putting itself consciously at the service of the family of man, and the document takes pains to dispel false conceptions of the Christian attitude towards temporal involvement. "It is clear that

men are not deterred by the Christian message from building up the world or impelled to neglect the welfare of their fellows, but that they are rather the more stringently bound to do those very things." (art 34) "Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's Kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God." (art 39)

It is still a topic discussed among theologians why and how in this latter part of the 20th century the Church changed her attitude to the world and adopted an approach characterized by love and concern, joy and hope. According to some, it is the impact of Marxism which prompted the Church to affirm the positive meaning of the secular order. For others, it is the rediscovery of the teaching of the Bible in its totality which allows Christians to see God's concern for man and his world. In fact, the most powerful and authentic statement about God's concern and commitment to the world is presented in Jn 3:16; "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." Here the world is seen as the object of God's love and concern, as the abode of the children of God. It is true that same author speaks about the world in a different tone: "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world." (Jn 16:33) Moreover, in the priestly prayer, Jesus positively states that his disciples do not belong to the world, in the same way as he does not belong to it, and asks the Father to keep them safe from the Evil One as they live in the world (cf. Jn 17:14-16).

It is a study by itself to go into the details of this change of tone and attitude towards the world in this Gospel. However, because the very same author is presenting two opposing views about the world, it is necessary to dwell briefly on this point, precisely because it was the negative attitude of the Johannine writings that became the pattern of the Christian approach to the world in the past many centuries. In the first half of the Gospel of John (chs 1-12) there are many references which show

God's benevolence and salvific intent towards the world (1:29; 3:17; 4:42; 6:33-51; 8:12; 9:5; 10:36; 12:47). But many did not recognize and accept this gift of God; it was not simply a rejection, but a real opposition. And so, as the ministry of Jesus advances and particularly in the second half of the Gospel (chs 13-19), "the world" is rather consistently identified with those who have turned against Jesus under the leadership of Satan, and a strong note of hostility is associated with the use of "the world". Jesus' coming has become a judgement on the world (12:31).

It seems it is precisely a lack of understanding the specific context in which a particular writer of the Bible articulated his theology that very often causes confusion regarding the meaning and the message of the Bible. Sometimes it happens that such a particular theological trend is absolutized and is applied to the whole of Christian theology. We very often ignore the basic fact that the Bible is the Word of God in words of men. Whereas the word-of-God-dimension means a message that transcends time and space, the words-of-men-dimension limits its absoluteness and demands that we scientifically and critically analyse the text of the Bible with reference to its context. Only so could we arrive at the true meaning of the Bible as the Word of God.

The studies appearing in this issue of *Jeevadhara* are aiming at analysing the concept of the 'sacred' and the 'secular' in the biblical tradition in view of establishing a correct perspective of the realities which constitute the world. It is hoped that the studies presented in this issue of *Jeevadhara* will enable the readers to further clarify their thoughts about the 'sacred' and the 'secular' as related to this world.

K. Luke studies the concept of the sacred and the profane in Mesopotamia, especially in the age of the Sumerians, to show the context and background of this theme. K. V. Mathew analyses the secular and the sacred in the Primeval History (Gen 1-11) where we have the story of the creation of the world and the origin of evil and its

progressive growth presented in a universal perspective. In his study on the complementarity of the Sacred and the Secular in the Prophetic Tradition E. C. John analyses the concreteness and the thoroughness of the prophets' understanding of the Holy One of Israel demanding justice and righteousness on the part of Israel in the practice of her religion. R. Vande Walle examines the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament in order to show the Secular as the basis of the Sacred. George M. Soares-Prabhu studies the Johannine Sūtrā: "The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:4) and sees in it the involvement of the sacred in the secular as an abiding reality. R. J. Raja examines the Acts of the Apostles and analyses the various aspects of Sacralized Secularity in it.

The purpose of these studies is to highlight the interdependence and the complementary dimension of the Sacred and the Secular, which is a very necessary and indispensable approach in the context of a theology of secularization and liberation that is gaining momentum in our times. Some think that the theology of secularization and liberation is an adaptation of Marxist ideology and that it is a convenient way of making Marxism palatable and agreeable to Christians. It is true that Marxism enabled theologians to open their eyes to certain neglected areas of theological reflection and consequently it has rendered a good service to Christian Theology. At the same time, it may be observed that the basis of the theology of secularization and liberation is in the very heart of the biblical revelation and the various books of the Bible give eloquent proof of this truth. What we need is a scientific and critical mind, an unbiased approach and creative thinking in our understanding of the sacred and the secular.

Joseph Pathrapankal

The Sacred and the Profane in Mesopotamia

The sacred and the profane are factors that have had a tremendous impact on the religious life of mankind, and they can be studied from different points of view; thus one may analyse the vocabulary used to denote them¹, or describe them in the light of the phenomenology of religion² or adopt a positivistic, historical method of approach. We shall follow the positivistic method, and to keep the study within bounds, the discussions will be restricted to the earliest period in the history of Mesopotamia, i. e., to the age of the Sumerians.

I

The sacred and the profane are antonyms, notions or realities which are mutually exclusive, and which are ultimately derived from man's experience of the *numinosum*, "the Numinous"³. The word sacred comes from Latin, and among the Romans there were current several definitions of *sacrum*⁴: "quidquid destinatum est diis sacrum vocatur";

1. E. Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* (London, 1973) pp. 444-528. C. D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages. A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (2nd impr., Chicago, 1965) pp. 1475f.

2. F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Die Religionen der Menschheit 1, Stuttgart, 1961; rev.ed., 1975) pp. 34ff. (exhaustive discussions). G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 2 vols., Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1963.

3. R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Galaxy Books, Oxford, 1965. C. Colpe (ed.), *Die Diskussion um das "Heilige."* Wege der Forschung 305, Darmstadt, 1977 (a collection of studies from 1877-1964).

4. J. Ries (ed.), *L'expression du sacre dans les grandes religions. I. Proche-Orient et traditions bibliques.* Collection "Homo Religiosus"

"sacrae (res) sunt quae diis consecratae sunt"⁵. In modern terminology the sacred is something that is bound up with the experience of the *numinosum*, and signifies the sum-total of everything pertaining to the numen as apprehended intuitively⁶. The question now is, how did man in Mesopotamia experience it?

Man in early Mesopotamia⁷ apprehended the sacred as power immanent in the visible world and intransitive in itself. By power is meant the *élan vital*, the vital urge or potency which is operative in the rear of birth, growth, death and return to life and which is seen everywhere in the material world. This process affects not only men but also the gods, who, in the earliest religious traditions of the Sumerians, were thought of as embodiments of power in some form or other (cf. below).

The numinous is immanent⁸, in the sense that it is not something that is distinct from and stands over and against the world of experience⁹ but is within it, disclosing

1. Louvain, 1973 (two more vols. dealing with Hinduism, etc., Mazdaism, NT, etc.) On the etymology of the word, cf. J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (2 vols., Bern, 1949-59) I, p. 878.

5. K. Abel, *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der antiken Welt* (5 vols., DTV ed., Munich, 1979) IV, cols. 1486f. C.T. Lewis-C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (repr., Oxford, 1969) pp. 1610f.

6. On intuition (Greek *epibole*), cf. T. Kombsch, in J. Ritter et alii, (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Darmstadt, 1971ff.) IV-cols, 524-40 (cf. too *ibid.*, A. Heyting, cols. 540-44),

7. There is vast literature on the religions of Mesopotamia; the following works deserve to be specially noted. E. M. Cassin, *La splendeur divine. Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne. Civilisations et Sociétés* 8. Paris, 1968. E. Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* Collection "Mana" I/1. Paris, 1949. T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness. A History of Mesopotamian Religion*. New Haven, 1976. B. Landberger, *Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt*. Libelli 142. Darmstadt, 1965 (originally published in 1926), H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*. SPCK Large Paperbacks, London, 1973. W. von Soden, *Leistung und Grenze sumerischer und babylonischer Wissenschaft*. Libelli 142, Darmstadt, 1965 (originally published in 1936).

8. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 5f.

9. In the OT the position is that Yahweh stands over and against the

itself as power through the various expressions of the élan vital. Intransitiveness means that the numinous power lets itself be experienced "in the specific situation or phenomenon that did not reach out beyond it"¹⁰. Being immanent in, being bound to a particular phenomenon, imparts to the numinous power, the characteristic of intransitiveness. Subsequently, however, the transitive aspect of power came to be emphasized, a development that will not be discussed in this study.

The Sumerians had their own terminology of the sacred, and here belongs the technical term *me* which has been defined as¹¹.

une immanence divine dans la matière morte et vivante;
incrée, inchangeable, subsistante, mais impersonnelle,
dont seuls les grands dieux disposent.

In short, *me* is the primordial exemplar, the supreme archetype, the very ground of everything, and it often crops up in religious poetry where it is praised to the heavens¹². The expression figures in personal names: *Me-ane-si*, "the Me fills the sky" (son of Enatuma I of Lagash, circa 2424-05), *Me-durba*, "the Me in their totality" (king of Adab, circa 2500), *Me-en-lila*, "the Me of (the god) Enlil" (daughter of Shulgi, a celebrated ruler of the third dynasty of Ur, circa 2050-1950), *Me-salim*, "the Me are safe" (king of Kish, circa 2550), *Me-girimta*, "the Me of purity" (daughter of Lugalkisalsi, king of Uruk, circa 2400), and so on.

Another term belonging here is *ní* "awesome aure" which was often associated with temples¹³, and this is also

processes in nature, for he is the one who has brought them into being. Nature has nothing divine about it, and the Israelite accounts of creation inculcate an aggressive attitude towards it (Gen 1:26ff.).

10. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

11. J. J. A van Dijk, *La sagesse sumero-accadienne* (Commentationes orientales 1, Leiden, 1953) p. 10. Brief discussions in Luke, "Sumerian Wisdom", *The Living Word* 85 (1979) pp. 3-26 (pp. 3-9).

12. Examples in Luke, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-7.

13. F. Delitzsch, *Sumerisches Glossar* (repr., Leipzig, 1969) pp. 198f. Cf. *ni-hush* (Accadian *rashubbatu*), "awesome aura, splendour".

the case with regard to *me-lam*, "awesome nimbus"¹⁴; compare the statements, "temple laden with great awesome aura and angry nimbus", "laden with awesomeness, its beams of awe and glory reach toward heaven, = etc. The temple's sacredness was such that it became identified with the power dwelling within it; compare the names *É-babbar*, "house-rising-sun", *É-hush* "house-terrifying", *É-kur*, "house-mountain", *Kur-gal*, "mountain-great", and the like. Since the temple and the god dwelling within it are identical, the sanctuary becomes the very sacred in all its concreteness¹⁵.

A further term that has to do with the sacred is *nam-tar*, "fate, destiny"¹⁶; the opening words of the long poetical inscription of Gudea of Lagash¹⁷ are noteworthy: *ud-an-ki-a nam-tar-rid-a*, "Als im Himmel und Erde die Schicksale entschieden worden."¹⁸ The major gods decide the fate of mankind in the *unkin*, "general assembly"¹⁹, and since fate can often be a hard and painful one, *nam-tar* came to be pictured as a demon who is in charge not only of man's death but also of his undisclosed future. The fear of the demon was such that he came to be depicted as a biting dog: *nam-tar ur-ra-am zú mu-un-da-an-kur* ("The demon) Fate is a dog: he has bitten him"; *nam-tar ur-zir-ra-am egir-ra-na mu-un-du*, "(The demon) Fate is vicious dog

14. Surviving in Accadian as *melammu*, "splendour"; cf. *me-lam an-na*, "splendour of the heavens" (Delitzsch, *op. cit.*, p. 186).

15. As pointed out by Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 16f.

16. In Sumerian *nam* is the prefix that creates abstract nouns. *lugal*, "king", *nam-lugal*, "kingship", *dub-sar* "scribe", *nam-dub-sar*, "scribeship", *tar*, "to determine", *nam-tar*, "what is determined, fate", etc.

17. Original text in F. Thureau-Dangin, *Les cylindres de Goudea*. Textes cuneiformes, Musée de Louvre, Département des antiquités, Paris, 1925; transcription and translation in the same author's *Die sumerischen und akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Vorderasiatische Bibliothek I/1, repr. Leipzig 1972) pp. 88-141.

18. Falkenstein, in A. Falkenstein-W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Bibliothek der alten Welt, Reihe: Der alte Orient, Zurich, 1953) pp. 137-83 (German translation of the whole inscription).

19. Or, the free citizens' assembly, with which rested supreme power;

(who) makes one walk behind him''²⁰. However, there was too the custom of visualizing fate as an abstract entity²¹.

The cyclic nature of fate is described thus: "In a taunt is its taunt; in a curse is its curse. (Such is) the constant renewal of destiny" (*nam-tar ra*)²². One taunt will evoke another, and one curse will call for another, thus bringing about a never-ending chain-reaction, which forms the cyclic process created by fate.

Reverting now to numinous power, we say that it has been given name and form, i.e., it is personalized and deified; and in this way there arose the earliest gods of the Sumerians: Utu is the name of the sun-god and it denotes both the name and the visible form; Ezinu is the grain-goddess, the grain that the farmer sows in the ground as well as the green stalks, "standing in the furrow like a lovely young girl"²³. The god Ningishzida, "lord of the good tree", represents the numinous in trees, enabling them to draw nourishment from the earth, grow up and yield fruit; the celebrated god Dumuzi, "the quickener of the child" (in the mother's womb), has to do with fertility (cf. below).

The life-process in the world has as its antithesis the fact of death, the awareness of which engendered in the minds of the ancients the idea of an incessant conflict of

the sign denoting *unkin* occurs in the earliest Sumerian texts, and Jacobsen defends the view that there was among the Sumerians an early variety of democracy; cf. his study, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia", *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian Culture* (Harvard Semitic Series 21, Harvard, 1970) pp 157-70.

20. E. I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs. Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Greenwood repr., New York, 1968) pp. 185f. (2:11), 187 (2:14).

21. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 82 (1.83).

22. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, p. 7.

23. As pointed out by H. and H. A. Frankfort, *Before Philosophy. The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1966) pp. 237ff. Cf. too H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as Integration of Society and Nature* (4th impr., Chicago, 1964) *passim* (cf. n. 35 below).

wills, of an incessant threat to the established order of the universe²⁴. Accordingly the primary preoccupation of me- was with the preservation of the established order, the main- tenance of the *status quo*, whose disturbance would mean the victory of the forces of chaos, and to hinder this it was necessary for society to be continually integrated into the vital process of nature. And this integration was achieved above all through religious ritual whose meaning came to be elucidated with the help of myths²⁵.

Religion, in the Sumerians' world-view, is nothing other than the endeavour to be harmoniously integrated into the process of nature and thus find security and sal- vation; in other words, to preserve unchanged and undi- minished life and its potencies, which were the highest good that could be imagined, there was religion with its ritual. The main factors in early Sumerian ritual were the Dumuzi cult and the *hieros gamos*, "the sacred marriage"; both these elements (which so to speak form the very core of the sacred in ancient Mesopotamia) must now be care- fully analysed.

II

The name Dumuzi consists of the direct object *dumu*, "child", and the base *zi*, "to quicken"²⁶, and it therefore means "he who quickens the young ones" (in the ma- ternal womb); the name, it would seem, points to milk and its life-giving potency. The documents attest several forms of Damuzi: thus there is Dumuzi Amaus- humgalanna, "Dumuzi, the one great source of date clusters"; then there is Dumuzi the Shepherd son of Duttur, i.e., the personified ewe; there was too Dumuzi the cow- herd son of Ninsuna, i.e., the lady of the wild cows, and finally there was Dumuzi the child, worshipped under the name Damu²⁷.

24. The myths thus become the *hieros logos* explaining the *dromenon* or ritual which is the very core of the cult.

25. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

26. Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz*, pp. 338f, n, 23).

27. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* pp. 26f.

The antiquity of the cult of Dumuzi is established by the Uruk Vase, dating from the fourth millennium and depicting the sacred marriage between Dumuzi and Inanna²⁸. The relief shows the bride waiting at the gate to meet the bridegroom who is coming with bridal gifts consisting of all manner of edibles such as dates and ears of corn. And there are poems that describe at length the couple's courtship and wedding, which are at times quite realistic". Now what is of moment for us is the lament over Dumuzi's death.

The death of vegetation with the commencement of the hot summer signifies the death of Dumuzi, the god of life and fertility, and Inanna begins to mourn over him²⁹. The story is told in detail of her descent into the nether-world looking for Dumuzi³⁰, and there is too the account of the search for him by his sister Geshtinanna³¹. The interpretation of the myths is beyond the purview of this popular study.

Women were the ones who lamented over the death of Dumuzi³², and the purpose of this ritual was to share in his sufferings, so that they might also rejoice when he would be back to life. Through the performance of this ritual of mourning, Mesopotamian man hoped to be integrated into the process of nature, and in this way he had his experience of the sacred³³.

28. Reproduced in Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 24. J.B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 1954) p. 171 (no. 502); cf. too *ibid.*, p. 308 (explanation),

29. Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-73. S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite, Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington, 1969) pp. 104-33.

30. Translation by Kramer, in Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (2nd ed., Princeton, 1955) pp. 52-57.

31. The name means, "the leafy grapevine", "there is also her epithet Ama-Gestinna (dialectal variant Ama-Mutinna), "root-stock of grapevine" (Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 62).

32. Ez 8:14 records how women in Israel were lamenting over Tammuz (cf. the next note).

33. The Accadians continued the Dumuzi tradition; they modified the

III

Another way in which the experience of the sacred was realized was the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage³⁴, a rite that goes back to the fourth millennium (cf. above the remark about the Uruk Vase). There are a number of *hieros gamos* texts, all dating roughly from 2050-1800 B.C., when kings were in the habit of adding to their names the determinative *dingir*, "god". The king plays the part of the god of life and he does so in his capacity as the one who represents the people of his realm.

The sacred marriage was the crowning act of the Akitu³⁵ or New Year festival, celebrated at the beginning of autumn or spring, and originally among the Sumerians each local god had his New Year festival, but these celebrations never had the éclat and glamour that characterized the function at Babylon. The Semitic rulers of Mesopotamia made it a point to celebrate the feast on as a grand a scale as possible, and the reader can get a clear idea of their zeal from a letter written in the eighteenth century B. C. by Shashi-Adad of Assyria (1749-17) to his son Yasmah-Adad, the governor of Mari on the Euphrates: the father asks his son to send a team of horses and hinnies to Shubat-Enlil his capital, and promises to return the ani-

the name to Tammuz, and had their own elaborate liturgy of his death and return to life. For a short account, cf. B. M. Rodrigues, "Tammuz In the Traditions of the Ancient Orient", *Jeevadhara* 9 (1979) pp. 89-99. Cf. too Jacobsen's original study, "Towards the Image of Tammuz", *Towards the Image of Tammuz*, pp. 73-103,

34. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, pp. 27-47. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage*, pp. 49-84. A sacred marriage text is studied at some length by the present writer in "Iddindagan and Inanna: A Hieros Gamos Text of the 20th Century B. C.", *The Living Word* 82 (1976) pp. 79-101.

35. This is a Sumerian term denoting the festival as well as the sanctuary where it was celebrated; cf. *The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago, 1964ff.) I/1, pp. 67-72. Von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (3 vols., Heidelberg, 1965-82) I, p. 29. Discussions in Falkenstein, "akiti-Fest und akiti-Festhaus", *Festschrift für Johannes Friedrich* (Heidelberg, 1959) pp. 147-82. Frankfort, *Kingship and Gods*, pp. 313-33. R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Études d'Assyriologie, 2 Paris, 1939) pp. 166-76. R. Largetment,

mals after the feast³⁶! Horses were rare animals at the time when the letter was written, and they would serve to fascinate the crowds that would come for the New Year festival. It is to be remembered that the animals had to make a journey to and fro of some 600 km³⁷.

The *hieros gamos* rite at the commencement of the year had in view the safeguarding of life and fertility throughout the entire year, which is the same as saying that it harmoniously integrated man into the process of nature and made provision for his well-being during the coming year. Mesopotamian man had thus his own special experience of the sacred.

IV

Etymologically the Latin word *profanum*³⁸ means that which is before the temple, i.e., outside (the main entrance to) the temple, and therefore opposite to the temple considered as a holy or sacred spot. From Latin writers we wish to cite two definitions of the profane: "profanum, quod non est sacrum"; "profanum est quod fani religione non tenetur"³⁹.

In common usage the profane is anything to be avoided, which therefore becomes the object of *tabus*, and the

Dictionnaire de la Bible Supplement (Paris, 1928ff.) VI, col. 556-97. S. A. Pallis, *The Babylonian Akitu Festival*. Det Kgl. Danske Videnskabs Selskab., Hist.-fil. Meddelelser 12/1, Copenhagen, 1926. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituel accadien* (Paris, 1921) pp. 127-54 (Accadian text and translation of two documents dealing with the ritual of the New Year festival). For the English version, cf. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 331-34.

36. Cf. *Archives royales de Mari, transcriptions et traductions* Paris 1950ff.) I, p. 56 (let. no. 46.5-20).

37. This has been pointed out Falkenstein, *op cit.*, p. 157.

38. W. Eisenhut, *Der Kleine Pauly* II, col. 514. The word *fanum* has traditionally been linked with *fari*, "to speak", an etymology which has no scientific basis. The term represents a modification of *fas-no-m* which goes back to the base *dhes-* found in religious vocabulary and surviving, for example, in Armenian *dikh*, "gods" (from *dhesos*), Latin *feriae* (from *tesiae*), *festus*, etc. For correspondences, cf. Pokorny, *Worterbuch* I, p. 259.

9. Lewis-Short, *Latin Dictionary*, p. 1456.

Mesopotamians, like all other ancients, had their own series of tabus. The best source we have at our disposal for the study of the tabus of the Sumerians is their proverbs which have of late been the object of several specialized investigations⁴⁰. We shall therefore cite here a couple of proverbs that have to do with the tabus current among them and, though the interpretation of particulars is not always easy, the overall sense is beyond doubt.

The Sumerian term for tabu is *nig-ga*⁴¹; compare the following proverbs: "If his food be something sexually defiling, one should not be overwhelmed by it"⁴²; "It is a dog which eats things (sexually) defiling"⁴³. Here is a proverb that has to do with specific sex tabu: "It is a thing which is unprecedented: a young girl will not sit in the lap of her husband"⁴⁴. This utterance, which has its background in the custom of child-marriage, forbids sex with a bride who has not reached the age of puberty.

In the following statement a woman is taunting her husband for observing the wrong tabus: "In the month of Teshritum he did not slaughter a pig; in the month of Ululum he did not put on a new turban"⁴⁵. The full implications of the two actions are not clear, and we do not even know whether they are favourable or unfavourable.

40. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs*, passim (cf. n. 20 above). Short introduction in Luke, "Sumerian Proverbs," *The Living Word* 85 (1979) pp. 3-26.

41. There are too other terms (e. g. *azag*, *ag-gig*, etc.) each with its own specific nuances.

42. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 60 (1:40); the reference here is apparently to some unlawful sex act, such as cunnilingus or fellatio.

43. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 258 (2:110). The reference is to the dog's habit of sniffing at its own or another dog's genitalia, and there is also an undeniable reference to man's violation of sex tabus.

44. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 47f. (1:12). The original text has *ki-sikil-TUR*, i. e., *ki-sikil*. "maiden", and *TUR*, "small", which means "virgin"; compare *ki-sikil shosh-zu sag nu-mu-ri-ib-kal-le* (1:148), "Maiden, your brother does not give you preference"; *ki-sikil-shesh-ma-e gi-l8 nam* (1:149), "Maiden, I am like a brother to you" (Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 116f.).

45. Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 132 (1:172).

Here is a proverb that has to do with eunuch-priest's role as a sacred catamite: "When the *kalum*-priest wiped his anus, (he said:) I must not excite that which belongs to my lady Inanna"⁴⁶. Among the Sumerians the eunuch-priest was the object of sarcasm, and the statement he makes is formulated in the Eme-sal dialect which is used only by females⁴⁷. There was a tabu about masturbation which is expressed by a pithy saying about the same priest: "When the *kalum*-priest threw his son into the water, (he said:) He should have built a city as I (have)..."⁴⁸

Though the pig (the scavenger par excellence in the Orient) was regarded as a dirty animal, there was no tabu about pork, but its lean ham fell under a tabu and was therefore served to slave-girls: "Meat (with) fat is (too) good! Meat (with) suet is (too) good! What shall we give to the slave-girl (to eat)? Let her eat the ham of the pig!"⁴⁹

It was at the time of military conquests that all the tabus came to be disregarded: "When one has wrought

46. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 248f. (2:100). The utterance expresses the sage's conviction that the action of the priest is tabu. The designation *kalum* is the Accadian equivalent of Sumerian *gala* written with the signs *ush-tush* (*ush*, "to be near, adjacent, close", and *tush*, "anus"). For a cult scene where the act in question is represented, cf. H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon* (Mentor Books, New York, 1968)-plate no. 60.

47. In Sumerian the female is called *sal*, and so the expression may mean "women's language", but be that as it may, there are extant syllabaries composed by scribes, indicating pronunciation of words in the usual language and in Emesal; the following list brings out the dialectal difference (Emesal words are in the second column).

<i>inim</i>	:	<i>enem</i> , "word"
<i>dug</i>	:	<i>zeb</i> , "good"
<i>gidri</i>	:	<i>mudru</i> "sceptre"
<i>agar</i>	:	<i>adar</i> , "field"
<i>Amanki</i>	:	<i>Enki</i> , the god of wisdom
<i>Mullil</i>	:	<i>Enlil</i> , the god of the sky

Brief discussions and further examples in Luke, "Sumerian Religious Lyric", *The Living Word* 83 (1977) pp. 75-99. (pp. 88-90).

48. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 247f. (2:99).

49. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 191f. (1:190-1),

devastation in a place (already) destroyed and made a break-through in a place not (yet) destroyed, when his place has become a place of... he has (usually) perverted its rites, wrought devastation in... and wiped out its divine norms..."⁵⁰ The present proverb has to do with the various acts of sacrilege and desecration perpetrated by conquerors.

The tabus are closely bound up with the sacred, and any violation of them constitutes sin, arouses the anger of the gods, and brings misfortune on the violator. A discussion of this aspect of the tabu cannot be attempted here, and the only thing we wish to recall here is that the Sumerians had a clear notion of the universal sinfulness of mankind: the sages say, "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother."⁵¹

The Sumerian idea of the sacred differs very much from its biblical counterpart, for it stems from a monistic world-view that visualizes everything as being subject to an all-pervasive process. However, it has its own significance, inasmuch as it represents an endeavour on the part of man to find happiness and security, an endeavour which, in the final analysis, is a quest after God. The tabus of the Sumerians, insofar as they are intended to safeguard the sacred have their own positive value. They may appear strange to some readers; unfortunately limitations of space do not allow us to discuss them in the light of cultural anthropology and show how parallels to them may be found among the people (both of the East and the West) of the space age.

Calvary Ashram
Trichur - 680 004

K. Luke

50. Gordon, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-79 (2:1). There are two words in the proverb indicating the sacred, *me* (in the text "rites"), and *garza* (in the text "divine norms"), this latter being a synonym of the former; cf. Luke, "Sumerian Wisdom", pp. 8f.

51. The passage cited in the text occurs in a Sumerian poem dealing with the problem of suffering; translation by Kramer, in Pritchard (ed.), *The Ancient Near East. Supplementary Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, 1969) pp. 589-91 (p. 590).

The Secular and the Sacred in Genesis 1-11

A bi-polar language is inevitable when the divine truth is discussed from a Biblical stand point in which a continuous communication is going on between the creator and the created. The realm is the world and the language is of the human. The source of truth is not confined to nor limited to the realm of creation. The cosmic phenomenon is temporal and has a beginning. In it is included the human to whom the source of life is revealed by the life-giver. Accordingly the cosmic phenomena are created, upheld and sustained by God whose realm is referred to as sacred while the realm of the human is secular.

These two realms are united through a covenant initiated by God. It is by maintaining the right relationship between the two through the covenant that the secular and the sacred jointly uphold the *shalom* in creation.

The Biblical faith expounded by the Church characterises in its very mode of communication the inseparable aspect of the secular and the sacred. In the language of the Bible we find these two, also in the Christ-event, and in its extension, the Church. A constant balancing of these two spheres are essential for intelligently communicating between the realm of God and the human.

In this study an attempt has been made to identify certain areas in which the secular and the sacred confront in the early chapters of Genesis. From the literary-critical point of view at least three sources have contributed to the formation of the proto-history found in Gen. 1-11, viz. the Yahwistic, the Priestly and the Elohist sources. In all

these three the concept of the secular and the sacred play a significant role.

Semitic background

An introduction to the Semitic understanding of the sacred and secular is necessary before we get into the chapters of Genesis. The O. T. literature is a product of the Semitic culture. What we find in it has its reflection from the Semitic background. According to the early Sumerians the phenomena of the heaven, atmosphere and the earth were believed to have been represented by three deities, viz. Anu, Enlil and Enki respectively¹. Another tradition holds the view that Nammu was the mother of both heaven and earth². Here we see an effort on the part of the early Sumerians to explain the close proximity between the realms of heaven and earth. They are not essentially separated. But they are not the same and a separation is necessary, the why of which is not explained. The relation of the two realms are maintained in order to guarantee life in the realm of the secular. It also envisages the longing of the human to be with the sacred. In other words, the desire for communion with the deity bridge the gulf between the secular and the sacred. In this earnest attempt of the human the separation of the two realms are almost ignored and virtually regarded both as one entity.

While the idea of communion is upheld the concept of immanence is carefully avoided in the semitic thinking. Such a view would be derogatory to the majesty of the high god of heaven. A constant dialectical tension is maintained when the concept of the transcendence and immanence are dealt with. In the O. T. that tension is reduced to a certain extent by the introduction of the concept of the covenant.

By secular and sacred we mean the dialectical relation between the world of God and the world of the human, the creator and the creation. The media of com-

1. Frankfort and others, *Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man*, p.137
 . S.N. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, p. 39.

munication is the word of the human. Our task here is to examine how these two realms are being expressed in the account of creation.

The secular and the sacred in creation

According to Westermann, 'Creation was not an article of faith because there was simply no alternative ... The O.T. has a different understanding of reality from ours, inasmuch as there was no other reality than that established by God. They had no need expressly to *believe* that the world was created by God because that was a presupposition of their thinking'³. That means that the O.T. was not narrating a faith in God as the creator, on the other hand it was declaring a *fact* of creation. However, the description does not deal with the *how* of creation, it only states the fact. In their thinking the distinction of the sacred and the secular was not maintained.

The first verse of the Bible begins with: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. The same idea is expressed by another tradition by saying, 'In the day that the Lord, God made the earth and the heavens' (Gen. 2:4b). "The heavens and the earth" is an expression used by the ancients for the modern concept of the 'universe'. The Biblical writer saw them as two realities while the modern man understands it as part of the same reality. According to Genesis, the heavens and the earth are created by God. God stands before and behind the universe. The so-called 'Seculum' is the work of God. Here the word 'Heavens' does not stand for the abode of God. It is god's creation, part of the universe.

It is through the language of the secular that the Yahwists and the Priestly traditionists are articulating the origin of the universe. What they are struggling to express is not a theological fact but a fact of the secular. The human striving to explain the origin of the physical universe did not begin with the literary articulation of the Yahwists' account in Gen. 2. The J and P accounts are the literary expressions of an already existing tradition in the

3. B.W. Anderson (ed), *Creation in the O.T.*, p. 93

Semitic world. Apart from J and P, the Psalmists, Job/Proverbs, Deutero Isaiah have reflected on the same theme in course of the Biblical history. It was on the heritage of the ancient West Asian thinking on the origin of the universe that the Hebrew thinkers deliberated. The purpose of their deliberation was to discover the meaning of human existence in the cosmic realm. To accomplish their goal they used mythopoetic language, the meaning of which was misunderstood by later interpreters. It was this misunderstanding that made the Bible a book of religion unrelated to secular life. About which Westermann says, "A teaching on creation had been constructed out of the narrative of creation and the praise of the creator. This meant a teaching which had laid down a seven-day creation programme, or a definite way of conceiving things; for example, the heavens were a solid body. This was a serious misunderstanding of the Biblical reflection on Creator-Creation"⁴

A break-through is necessary in our hermeneutical task, without which the misunderstanding continues indefinitely. We have to state afresh that the Bible is concerned with this world and its meaning for the human. It is refreshing to know that the natural scientists too slowly have come to recognise the fact that the Bible and theologians are concerned with this world. In 1978 an essay prepared by Robert Jastrow, himself an agnostic, dared to suggest that developments in modern astrophysics bring us close to the Genesis view of the origin of the universe in a cosmic flash. The paper was produced as a Phi Beta Kappa lecture for the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Jastrow says:

"For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself for the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries"⁵.

4. B.W. Anderson, op. cit., p. 93

5. B.W. Anderson, op.cit., p. 16

It is undoubtedly true that the mythopoetic language of the Bible leads us finally to the mystery of the origination of the cosmos: the mystery that Job (38:4-7) was asked to contemplate.

In the ancient West Asian world four possibilities have been suggested in explaining the origin of the Universe.

i. *A Theory of Conflict*⁶. Accordingly the secular is the result of a conflict in the realm of the sacred. Originally the earth and the heaven belonged to one entity. Later it was cut into two by Marduk. Tiamat was split open; with one half Marduk created the earth and with the other the heaven⁷. The human is created to relieve the gods from the menial service to the high Gods. The Babylonians maintained this view.

ii. *A Theory of Birth*. The ancient Phennicians held the view that everything secular came out of a primeval egg. Sanchuniation is the protagonist of this view⁸.

iii. *A Theory of Emanation*. According to this theory the visible universe is emanated from God. The secular is sacred incognito. In actuality both are one at the same time. No distinction can be attributed. It is this view that is being held by the *Advaidins* of India.

iv. *A Theory of the Word*. By this the secular came into being as a consequence of a word uttered by Ptah, the patron god of the ancient Egyptians⁹. They maintained the sharp distinction between the secular and the sacred. However, an attempt has been made to explain its relation.

The Genesis narrative of creation by the word is to be understood in the light of what is explained in the ancient Egypt. Here we find two versions, the J and the P (Ch. 2: Ch. 1), the act version and the word version. The Hebrew language has a double meaning for the word *davar*. It expresses a deed and a word. It also could mean an event, something that happened. The beginning of the

6. B. W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos*, p. 25.

7. Susan Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos*, cf. p. 17.

8. W. R. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* pp. 194, 195, 212ff

9. Frankfort and others, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

universe is an event. According to J it is the result of an act. Verbs indicating action have been used in J Narrative¹⁰, while in P mostly utterance of the word is employed in creation¹¹. Since the P version represents a later age than J the act of God is also employed in giving shape to the formless chaos. The verbs *bara* and *asha* are used¹². *Bara* suggests an effortless act and requires no material to begin with, but *asha* means giving shape to an already existing matter. It is possible that these two verbs represent two strata of thought world and later combined into one narrative bearing almost parallel meanings. According to Westermann, 'the texts which have come down to us have had a long oral tradition, and that the written sources where we meet these traditions are the final stages of a long process of tradition which must itself be examined'¹³.

To explain the relation between the secular and the sacred, the Bible makes use of the 'word theory' whether in the sense of an act or an utterance. The creation process began with the word of God. 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth'¹⁴. And God said let there be¹⁵. The word is the creative power, pregnant with divine initiative and purpose. That prior to the divine initiative the cosmos / the world of existence never was and without the word of God the cosmos would never be, is the sum and substance of the Biblical view of the cosmos. Concerning this view, B. W. Anderson comments, 'the implication is that if the creator's power were suspended chaos would return. The cosmos is not an autonomous whole governed by its own laws but is completely dependent on the God who transcends it. Moment by moment it is held in being by the sovereign will of the creator'¹⁶. (cf. Ps. 104, Gen. 8:22) The scientists of the twenty first century have already included in their agenda, experiments to discover the secret or ultimate principle that holds the universe together. Their search would include investigation to discover whether there is one single

10. Gen. 2:4, 7-9, 15; 18, 21. 11. Gen. 1:3, 6, 7, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 28.

12. Gen. 1.1, 21, 26, 2:4, 9. 13. B.W. Anderson (ed.), op. cit., p. 94.

14. Ps. 33:6. 15. Gen. 1:3, 6,9 etc. 16. B.W. Anderson, op. cit., p. 13

principle or more than one, that guides the destiny of the universe. Would there be a meeting point between the theologians and the scientists in the 21st century?

From a metaphysical angle creation is a process of the being into becoming. The becoming is the cosmic secular and the being is the sacred. There is no distinction between being and becoming in quality. They are co-eternal. Will there be a cessation of the becoming? If so, will it mean the exhaustion of the being? The metaphysical view does not answer the problem of evil and decay in the realm of becoming.

The Biblical narrative of creation obviously deals with the beginning of the physical universe. It, while upholding the distinction between God and the secular, explains the relation between the two as a relation of dependence. The reflections of other writers in the Bible too maintain the same point of view. However, each of them makes use of the understanding of their own thought world. According to J the Lord God formed *Adam* of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and *Adam* became a living being. The rib which the Lord God had taken from *Adam*, God made into a woman¹⁷. The same idea is expressed in a different manner by P. God created *Adam* in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them¹⁸. What J has said of the polarity of sexes in Gen. 2, is implied in Gen. 1. So we read that *Adam* was not merely a single entity but bi-polar, male and female. Both make *Adam* and both are created in the image of God. They are related to the red soil of the earth and therefore they are secular. The life of the secular-being *Adam* is implanted by God. So it is in *Adam* the sacred-secular meet. The sacred-secular distinction is abolished in the human.

The language of the sacred and secular is the language of the human who understands both these realms. The concept of the secular alone or secularism is not the language of the Biblical man. The sphere of the sacred

17. Gen. 2.7,22.

18. Gen. 1.27.

contra-distinct from the secular is not the Biblical view. The religious interpretation of the creation narrative unfortunately led many to isolate the Biblical view of creation as purely theological religious devoid of any secular significance. The Church continued the same hermeneutical method. A break-through is necessary to integrate the secular-sacred distinction.

The secular-sacred dilemma — a human predicament

A harmonious relation that existed in the garden of Eden ceased to exist. In its place a distortion in the community life of the human and their relation with God took place. The sacred-secular distinction continued as a dilemma in human existence. Distortion and disruption are realities in life in the realm of the human and the divine and in the realm of the human and nature¹⁹. In the light of what we read in Gen. 3, the human was pushed into this predicament of being refused to have access to the realm of the sacred because the human failed to have dialogue with the divine. Instead they began theologising with the serpent putting God in the third person. Freedom with limitation was misused, permission was taken as freedom without boundaries. Vocation was neglected²⁰. It is this state that sustains the distance between the secular and the sacred.

Here the human stands naked before God defenceless and unprotected. The most surprising thing happens. The judge becomes the protector and saviour. The gulf of separation again is bridged. This is a constant occurrence that we find in the Bible, the retiring human and the seeking, advancing God. Thus the sacred-secular syndrome continues²¹. The hubris-oriented human took decisions for himself, exercised freedom independent of God which resulted in fratricide, genocide²², lasciviousness²³ and absolute corruption²⁴. A situation so much precipitated the destruction of the entire *seculum*²⁵.

19. Gen. 3:8, 12-13, 15, 17f. 20. W. Bruggemann, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

21. Susan Niditch, *op. cit.*, p. 33. 22. Cf. Gen. 4.

23. Cf. Gen. 6. 24. Cf. Gen. 6ff. 25. Cf. Gen. 7-8.

Process of creation was repeated after subsiding the chaotic situation. An earthling was found righteous, one in whose life the secular could meet the sacred, one in whom a just relation between the sacred and the secular began. Crowning and confirming the new relation a new covenant of universal significance was made between God and the righteous human²⁶.

Covenant is the language through which the Bible explained the relation between the sacred and the secular. It assumed the distance and at the same time expounded the relation. According to Alan Richardson, 'God transcends the universe which he has made, just as his presence is not confined within the temple on Mount Zion; nevertheless God is present to His works which he sees to be good, and his glory is revealed in them to the eyes which are illuminated by his light'²⁷. The secular and the sacred are not understood in contrast to each other, on the other hand they are regarded as complimentary. Both are meant to be one although in actual existential situation they are not. Life in the secular is a continuous endeavour either with an urge to be with the sacred or to be away from it. A tension is implied. The secular is the sum and substance of this tension with the sacred.

A secular culture - challenge to the sacred

The secular human prevailed over the sacred. The human created in the image of God is divided, distorted and disintegrated. Cain was the son of the distorted relation and was of the secular interest devoid of sacred vision. Abel represented the human aptitude for the sacred. When Cain was born his name was given to him as praise to God. As first born he embodies future possibility²⁸, possibility of might, possession and domination, the record of which is focussed in the course of his life. In the New Testament Cain is reckoned as a form of evil²⁹. He seems to be the product of a theology introduced by the serpent in which God is spoken of as a third person.

26. Gen. 8.20-9.17. 27. Alan Richardson, *Genesis* 1-IX, p. 44.

28. Walter Bruggemann, *Interpretation-Genesis*, p. 56

29. Cf. 1 Jn. 3.12, Jude 11

We find that when the human is preoccupied with the self, God is elbowed out and is not addressed in dialogical terms. In the serpent-woman conversation God is referred to as a third person. When theology thus introduced in the way of the serpent, the human and their interest in the secular would be given prominence. Such theologies are not talks *to* God or *with* God but *about* God³⁰. When theology takes the place of obedience to God we may expect an uprise of secular humanism.

It is with the descendants of Cain that we find the radical nature of sin³¹, the development of culture³² and the beginning of a confessional form of established religion³³. This is an explanation of a world without reference to God. Here we find the secularisation process in progress.

The newly acquired freedom accompanied with the secret of knowledge accelerated the speed of secularisation. The expulsion from the garden the region of the presence of God out into the land of Nod led the man of possibility and strength to work out his own destiny. A world of his own was the result of being away from the garden. There was no limit to his vision and his ability to work out the destiny of humanity. The prohibition in Gen. 2:17 is violated and the wisdom that the human gained followed its own course of aggressiveness. Prohibition given by God is to be understood not in the sense of negation. It is a condition of qualification which would set bounds to the unbridled desires of man that would inevitably lead to anxiety, fatigue, decay and death. It was intended to safeguard the earthly creature, the human from ultimate death. It was to provide life to the human to work along with God in the realm of creation. The whole purpose of God was misunderstood by the serpentine theology which has bypassed the dialoguing and encountering God.

The World of culture initiated by the theology of the serpent maintained consistently a negative attitude to

30. W. Bruggemann, op. cit, p. 48

31. Cf. Gen. 4:8-11

32. Cf. Gen. 4:17, 21-22

33. Cf. W. Bruggemann, op. cit., p. 67

the realm of the sacred. The descendants of Cain cried out for vengeance seventy-seven fold³⁴. The human created in the image of God trespassed the region of life and took the law of revenge in his own hands. 'The management of vengeance is an important theological matter. In the context of the building of the city, it is also a concrete, political, sociological matter. The containment of vengeance is necessary to the ordering of a stable society. The cry of Lamech militates against the city of Cain'³⁵.

The authority of the sacred was challenged by the sons of the secular world. In the realm of procreation, instead of responsible parenthood, irresponsible, free and 'as you like' *modus operandi* prevailed³⁶. *Bene Elohim*, the sons of mighty flagrantly refused to honour the privacy of the daughters of the sons of the soil. Sexual promiscuity was the order of the day - another obvious example of a secularised civilization.

The man-woman called to be workers in the garden in the presence of God changed their life-style in the light of a new god-talk introduced by the serpent behind God: Cain, Lamech and the *Bene Elohim* the successors of that new ideology of the man-woman; the new culture without God and the city made by the human to resist possible chaotic attack from God - all these suggest that what is wrong is that creation has refused to be God's creation, refused to honour God as God³⁷. Listen to what the Yahwist says, 'The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'³⁸.

To conclude, in the light of the Biblical picture particularly as we find in the early chapters of Genesis, we may say that the secular versus the sacred is not the emphasis of the Bible. A world independent of the vision of the sacred cannot stand. It will be a world of greed, possession, and domination. To transform the secularistic view of the world the Bible introduces the realm of the sacred, not as a separate realm but is in close proximity

34. Cf. Gen. 4:24.

35. W. Bruggemann, op. cit., p. 66

36. Cf. Gen. 6.1-4. 37. W. Bruggemann, op. cit. p. 76, 38. Gen. 6.5

with the secular. The world of the Bible thought of an intimate relation between the secular and the sacred. The idea was clarified through the concept of the covenant, a covenant between the human and God. The covenant is spoken in terms of universal, national, and personal significance. The covenant is intended for a balance in the realm of God and the human, the realm of the sacred and the secular. The covenant would bring forth *shalom*, peace and harmony in the world of human existence.

The human is the point of contact in the realm of God and the world, the secular and the sacred. It is this human relation with the sacred, the human vision of the sacred, the human orientation towards the sacred, that is explained through the term covenant. Since the human is the meeting point of the secular and the sacred, the human is accepted as the key to the understanding of the universe. According to Charles Birch the universe is understood as humiverse, 'We do not start with electrons and atoms and build a universe. We start with humanity and interpret the rest in terms of this starting point'³⁹. The human in the Bible is not a single entity, but a community of man/woman bound by a covenant made by God. The human thus sustained by the divine covenant is the one in the image of God explicitly expressed in relation to the world of creation and that too, in obedience to the word of God exhibited not through unlimited freedom but through responsible freedom in fulfilling the vocation given to humankind. While exercising the freedom granted by God to the human the distinction between the secular and the sacred recedes and *shalom* prevails in the realm of the secular. The human thus responsibly exercising the freedom in creation is Jesus Christ, the incarnate God/Human. It is in Him and in that realm we find the harmony of the secular and the sacred. Through Him the world of humanity, the realm of creation is explained and finds meaning. The secular/sacred is bridged and a new world of humanity is created.

K. V. Mathew

39. Charles Birch in *Faith and Science in an Unjust World*, p. 69

The Sacred in the Secular

Reflections on a Johannine Sutra: "The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

Perhaps the simplest way of communicating the specific flavour of biblical religiosity is to describe it as a *dharma* of the sacred in the secular. The description needs to be explained, for neither 'sacred' nor 'secular' are terms used with notable precision today. The third edition of the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* (1944) defines 'sacred' (from the Latin *sacer*, which means 'holy') as "consecrated to, esteemed especially dear or acceptable to a deity". The word is thus used of "things, places, and persons and their offices" which are "set apart for some religious purpose". By contrast, the word 'secular' (from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning 'generation, age', or, in Christian Latin, 'the world, specially as opposed to the church') is defined as "belonging to the world and its affairs, as distinct from the Church and religion". The terms 'sacred' and 'secular' thus stand in tension to each other: the 'secular' is what is not 'sacred' (it is "distinct from the church and religion"); the 'sacred' is what is not 'secular' (it is "set apart for some religious purpose"). The paradox of biblical religiosity is that it achieves a dialectic resolution of this tension. It locates the sacred in the secular; it encounters God in the world.

1. The background to the Johannine sutra: the world view of the Bible

The 'world' in which God is encountered in the biblical tradition is both the material cosmos, the world of *matter*, (which in Greek philosophy is opposed to the

realm of the spirit); and, also the empirical and contingent (*vyavahārika*) world of human *history* (which in Vedānta is opposed to the really real *paramārthika* realm of the Brahman). Both these overlapping oppositions Greek and Hindu are foreign to the Bible in which spirit is not the negation of matter but its integrating and vivifying principle (Gen 1:2; Ezek 37:1-14); and where history is not a hindrance to ultimate liberation (*moksha*) but the process in and through which the liberation of humankind and its world takes place.

The Bible is thus both holistic and historical. It is thoroughly holistic in its understanding of the human person who is depicted not as a soul in a body, like a charioteer in a chariot, but as an animated body (Gen 2:7). And it is equally holistic in its depiction of human destiny which it sees not as the salvation of souls, but as the resurrection of the *body* (1 Cor 15:35-50), in a new heaven and a new *earth* (Apoc 21:1). Such a holistic affirmation of matter excludes any sort of mysticism of the pure spirit — though this has been a standing temptation of Western theology ever since the Greek and Latin Fathers (and specially Augustine!) fell under the spell of neo-platonism¹; and will, I suspect, be a growing peril for Indian theology in its enthusiastic and often uncritical alliance with Brahmanism. That this does not lead to a nature mysticism which would sacralize nature is, I suspect, due to the complementary aspect of biblical religion, its historical character.

For, however strongly the Bible may approve of material creation (Gen 1:1-26), the focus of its interest is not nature but history. The foundational experience of biblical religion was not that of a God who created the heavens and the earth, for creation faith was incorporated late into the biblical tradition — only after creation itself had been interpreted as a saving event, and so linked up theologically with saving history². The foundational ex-

1. Cf. R. C. Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity and Christian Materialism* (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 10.

2. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I* (Edinburg: Oliver & Boyd, 1962) 136-37.

perience of biblical religion was, rather, the experience of a God who brought his people out from under the burden of the Egyptians (Ex 6:6-7). The God of the Bible is not a nature-god, tied to the cycle of the seasons, and serving to legitimize the structures of an agrarian based city state in which he is immovably located. Instead, he is the Lord of History free, untrammelled, unpredictable as history itself³.

This holistic and historical character of biblical religion colours the whole of the Hebrew Bible, which has been formulated, basically, as the confessional (faith interpreted) history of Israel and the world. "The Old Testament writings", von Rad tells us, "confine themselves to representing Jahweh's relationship to Israel and the world in one aspect only namely as a continuing divine activity in history"⁴. But this specifically historical character of the biblical tradition (the 'Sacred in the Secular') continues into and peaks in the New Testament, specially in the Gospels, which speak about the revelation of God in the history of Jesus. We find this formulated most explicitly in a Johannine *sūtra*, (Jn 1:14), on which we shall now reflect.

2. The Johannine sutra

Nowhere in the New Testament is the presence of the sacred in the secular affirmed so clearly as in the magnificent *sutra* which is the heart of the prologue to the gospel of John: "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). The profound significance of this dense and deep saying (formulated typically not as a doctrinal proposition, but as the description of an event) is best appreciated when we read it in its context in the prologue. We realize then that the formula serves to conclude a movement that begins with the opening words of the gospel (v. 1):

3. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 16

4. Von Rad (n. 2 above) 106.

verse 1

verse 14

In the beginning
was the word,

and the word was with God,
and the word was what God is.

(In the fulness of time)
the word became flesh

and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth.

Both verses speak explicitly of the Word, indeed they are the only verses of the prologue (Jn 1:1-18) to do so! The 'Word' they speak of is an undefined divine reality whose precise meaning is obscure (it may be the basis of but is not identical with the 'Word' of later trinitarian speculation) but whose first faint foreshadowings are probably to be seen in the Hebrew Bible⁵. For the Bible speaks of the creative word of God which brings into being the universe (Gen 1:1-26); of the word of the Lord spoken through the prophets, which comments on and changes history (Jer 1:9-10); and of the personified wisdom of God which exists with him as the first of his creatures, and his agent in creation (Prov 8:22-31; Wis 7:25-26). This mysterious 'Word', we are told in Jn 1:14, becomes 'flesh'; and the striking parallelism between the two verses which describe this becoming (for every element in v. 1 has its counterpart in v. 14) drives home powerfully its significance. For what the parallel verses tell us is that the 'word, which belongs to the realm of the divine (it is "with god" and is "what God is"), enters wholly into the realm of matter and of history (it 'becomes flesh' and it 'dwells amongst us'). The wholly sacred "becomes" the wholly secular!

a) The word becomes flesh

This secularization of the sacred is given special

5. There is no agreement among scholars about the origin and the background of the Johannine 'logos', which has been variously derived from the Old Testament, from Hellenistic Judaism, from Jewish Hellenistic Wisdom speculation, from Stoicism, from Gnosticism, and from various combinations of these. For a survey, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) 519-24. By indicating Old Testament intimations of the 'logos' I do not intend to suggest that John has derived his 'logos' christology from the Old Testament, but only that the 'logos' of the Johannine *sutra* fits into a biblical perspective, of which John would not have been ignorant.

point by John's use of the word 'flesh'. Flesh (*sarx*) is used by John in a variety of ways. It defines 'plain humankind' with no negative connotation whatever in Jn 17:2 (the only such text in the gospel), where Jesus says, "he (God) has given me authority over all flesh (*pasē sarx*)" — that is, over all human beings. It sometimes describes 'merely human nature', unenlightened by divine revelation, as in Jn 8:15 where Jesus accuses the Jews that "you judge according to the flesh (*kata tēn sarkan*)" — that is, by human criteria alone. Most often it stands for 'human nature in its weakness and mortality' as contrasted with the power and permanence of God, as in Jn 3:6 where Jesus informs Nicodemus: "That which is born of the flesh (*ek tēs sarkos*) is flesh and that which is born of the spirit (*ek tou pneumatos*) is spirit". Here as frequently in Paul 'flesh' (*sarx*) is contrasted with 'spirit' (*pneuma*), but without the suggestion of sinfulness that the word often has in Paul. Rather 'flesh' in John is used in its primary Old Testament sense of that which is creaturely, weak and ephemeral as opposed to the powerful and imperishable domain of the divine.

It is in this third sense that the word 'flesh' is used in Jn 1:14 whose word-flesh opposition recalls the hauntingly beautiful oracle of Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40:3) in which the fragile impermanence of the human situation (flesh) is contrasted with the rock like solidity of the word of God:

All flesh is as grass
and its beauty is as the flower of the field...
The grass withers and the flower fades
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

A similar contrast between 'word' and 'flesh' is implicit in Jn 1:14. As in Deutero-Isaiah, 'flesh' in Jn 1:14 stands for the creaturely, the historical, the radically transient, the world of matter and of human history. But 'word' here is more than the 'word of God' (God's message of judgment and grace articulated by the prophets) referred to in Isaiah's oracle. It is rather the ineffable primal reality that this prophetic word faintly foreshadows — a reality that belongs wholly to the realm of the divine

because it is "with God", and is "what God is" (Jn 1:14). The contrast between 'word' and 'flesh' in Jn 1:14 is pushed well beyond that suggested by Deutero-Isaiah — and is abruptly overcome: the word becomes flesh and dwells among us.

b) The word dwells among us

Because the Word becomes flesh it 'dwells among us'. This 'dwelling' of the Word among us is described by John in an unexpected way. He does not use *katoikein* (literally, 'to set up house' [*oikos*], a word normally used in the New Testament (44 times) for the 'settling down' of people in a place (Mt 2:23; 4:13); or (figuratively) for the 'occupation' of persons or groups by other-worldly spirits (Mt 12:45; Eph 3:17). Instead John has the relatively little known *skēnōn* (literally, 'to pitch a tent' [*skēnē*], a word found in the New Testament only here and four times in the Apocalypse of John (7:15; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3). The use of this word, Bultmann surmises, carries with it the suggestion of a temporary stay: "he stayed amongst us as a man, and he did so — for this is what is implied even if the emphasis is on the positive content of the statement — as a guest who took his leave again"⁶. But such an interpretation owes more, I suspect, to Bultmann's predefined interpretative schema of the 'gnostic redeemer' than to his exegesis of the text. For a while the gnostic redeemer does in deed visit the world temporarily, staying only until he has set free the scattered particles of the spirit that have been imprisoned in matter. There is no indication that John wants us to understand the 'dwelling' of the Word in this way. Johannine vocabulary suggests in fact the opposite. For when John wishes to indicate a temporary period of stay he uses *menein* ('to remain'), as in Jn 1:38f; 2:12; 4:40; 11:6; 19:31; or *diatribein* ('to spend time') as in Jn 3:22; 11:54; not *skēnōn* ('to dwell').

Indeed, whatever be the original or etymological meaning of the word, *skēnōn* is in fact used both in the

6. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 66-67

Old and the New Testaments without any suggestion of impermanence. In the Old Testament it describes the (presumably permanent) settling down of Lot in Sodom (Gen 12:13), and the permanent dwelling of two of the tribes of Israel in their specific tribal territories (Jdg 5:17). In its four occurrences in the New Testament outside Jn 1:14 the word is used twice in a stereotyped expression for the (permanent) inhabitants of heaven: "those dwelling (*skēnountes*) in the heavens" (Apoc 12:12; 13:6); and twice more for the eschatological (and therefore permanent) presence of God among his people (Apoc 7:13; 21:3). In itself then the word *skenoun*, does not indicate a temporary stay; and one cannot argue from it (as Bultmann does) that Jn 1:14 is speaking of a temporary dwelling of the word among us!

This becomes even clearer when the Johannine *sutra* is compared with Apoc 21:3 the New Testament text with *skenoun* which comes closest to it in form and content. The two texts are strikingly similar:

Jn 1:14

The word was made
flesh (*sarx*)
And dwelt (*eskenosen*)
among us

Apoc 21:3

Behold
The dwelling (*skene*) of God
is among men (*meta ton
anthropon*)
And he will dwell (*skenosei*)
among them
And they will be his peoples
And he will be their God.

There is an obvious parallel between the 'dwelling' (*eskenosen*) of the Word made flesh among us and the dwelling (*skenosei*) of God among all men, a dwelling hoped for in Old Testament prophecy, of which Apoc 21:3 is in fact a skilful collage (cf. Ezek 37:27; Zech 2:14). The eschatological presence of God in humankind predicted by the prophets, and projected into a vision of the future by the Apocalypse of John, has been according to the Johannine *sutra*, realized in history when the word became flesh, and dwelt among us. The word, then comes not as a 'guest' but as the decisive fulfilment of our history. He has

pitched his tent in the midst of the human world and has taken up his abode there"⁷. Human history has become sacred history with his coming.

3. The implications of the Johannine sutra

The implications of such a secularization of the sacred (which is not to be confused with a sacralization of the cosmos)⁸ are many, and they spill over into several areas of theological reflection. I shall limit myself here to reflecting on three such areas which correspond to three aspects as it were (the christological, the anthropological and the cosmic) of the *sutra* we are studying. Reflecting on these may help us to realize the extent to which Christian *dharma* has been secularized by the presence of the Word among us — even though Western Christian tradition steeped in Hellenism has been reluctant to acknowledge how completely the sacred has 'become flesh' in the secular.

a) Christological implications:

Incarnation not Avatara

Since the word become flesh is identified by John with Jesus of Nazareth his *sūtra* is a powerful Christological statement, and has indeed become almost the sole basis for Christological development in Western Christianity⁹. With its strong affirmation that the word has become flesh, it decisively excludes any sort of epiphanic or *avatara* type of Christianity which understands God as "appearing" in human history without really becoming a part of it. Bultmann's suggestion that "in both John and Paul christology is formed after the Gnostic Redeemer myth: the sending of the pre-existent son in the disguise of a man"¹⁰ (and so as an *avatāra*, which can be conveniently described

7. Ernst Haenchen, *John I* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 119.

8. Cf. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968) 31-50

9. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (London: Collins/Fount, 1983) 570

10. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament, Volume II* (New York: Scribner, 1955) 6.

as "an appearance of the deity")¹¹, is surely incorrect. The Word 'becomes' (*genetai*) and does not merely 'appear as' (*phainetai*) flesh; and it becomes not a human person (*anthrōpos*, *hā'adām*) but flesh (*sarx*, *bāsār*). What is implied then is the disclosure of the divine in human history (the sacred in the secular), and the real presence of God in material reality (the sacred in what is generally regarded as profane).

Unfortunately these implications are usually lost in the traditional understanding of the Johannine *sūtra*. Popular Christian catechesis at least continues to present Jesus not as the 'word made flesh' but as a god in human form. Jesus becomes a Christian *avatāra*, the divine gnostic redeemer disguised as a man. His divinity then becomes an alibi for our reluctance to follow him. The challenge of his self giving love, which confronts us in the gospel accounts of his words and his deeds, is neatly deflected with the reply: "but Jesus after all was God"... He becomes an object of devotion (worse still of devotions) not a paradigm for action. His historical effectiveness is neutralized¹². It has been one of the great merits of liberation theology to bring us back to a proper understanding of the Johannine *sutra*, by insisting that it is in the human life of Jesus, in its concrete, social, economic and political interactions, that God reveals himself. "He who sees me", says Jesus in the gospel of John, "sees the Father" (Jn 14:9). But what the disciples see is not his 'divinity', but a concrete human life, lived out in radical self-giving and obedience and service. It is this human life that tells us what God is like (that God is love!) because it is the visible expression, the 'flesh', of the Word that is what God is.

b) Anthropological implications: meeting God in humankind

Even when we have avoided the dangers of such a docetistic (spiritualizing) interpretation of the Johannine *sūtra*, other dangers remain. The individualism of Hellenistic philosophy, reinforced in recent years by the indi-

11. Jan Gonda, quoted in Margaret & James Butley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Bombay: Allied 1977) 32.

12. Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom* (New York: Orbis, 1977, 18-24

vidualism of bourgeois society, has led to a narrowly individualistic understanding of Jn 1:14 in popular Christian belief. The Johannine *sūtra* is read as a statement about the individual Jesus, insulated from the humankind to which he belongs. The 'flesh' which the Word becomes is then identified with the body (or at most with the 'humanity') of Jesus, with no reference to the rest of humankind. The christological significance of the *sutra* swallows up its anthropological meaning.

But this is not how Jn 1:14 was meant to be understood. Biblical thinking is always conscious of the solidarity of the individual with the community to which he or she belongs. "The nation", says H. R. Rowley, "was never thought of as an association of individuals, but as an organic whole in which parts were knit together without losing their individuality."¹³ And if this is true of Israel it is true also of humankind as a whole, for in the Bible God creates humankind (*hā'adam*) as one.

Such interconnectedness of the individual with the community is brought out pointedly in the Johannine *sūtra* by the use of the word 'flesh'. For flesh (*basar*) is used in the Hebrew Bible precisely to indicate that which 'binds people together' into the intimacy of marriage (Gen 2:23); into the oneness of a family (Gen 37:27); into the unity of humankind (Is 40:4f; 49:26); and indeed into the totality of all living beings (Gen 6:17). It is this biblical belief in the organic unity of humankind that allows Paul to argue from the universal consequences of the sin of Adam to the universality of the redemption wrought by Christ: "For as one man's trespass led to the condemnation for all men so one man's set of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom 5:18). Paul's argument presupposes that humankind is one, so that what is done by Adam or by Jesus, affects all. Everything belonging to the story of mankind", as John Dunne has said, "belongs to man's being"; it enters in some way or other into the life of each individual¹⁴.

13. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel* (London: SCM, 1961) 122

14. John E. D., *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) xi

The 'flesh' which the Word becomes, then, is not just the humanity of Jesus looked at in isolation. It is the humanity of Jesus organically linked to the whole of humankind. "He took upon himself the nature of all flesh", says Hilary of Poitiers in astonishingly realistic language, "and having in this way become the true vine, he holds in himself the racial strain of every branch."¹⁵ Because the Word has so "graced the human race"¹⁶, the biblical conviction that God is encountered in history (the sacred in the secular) takes on an altogether new density. The human person, any human person in his or her concrete historical (personal and societal) existence, becomes, because part of graced humankind, the privileged locus of our encounter with God.

One understands, then, why the human person is so central to the ethical teaching of Jesus, and why Jesus can say that the Sabbath is made for man not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27); that compassion is preferable to sacrifice (Mt 9:13; 12:7); that the duty of looking after one's aged parents supersedes any religious vows that one may make (Mk 7:9-14); that inter-human concern (*agapē*) is the basis of all law (Mt 22:40), and superior to all cult (Mk 12:33).

One understands too why Jesus in his 'great commandment' (Mt 24:34-40) improves on the great commandment of rabbinic Judaism. To the basic Old Testament commandment that one love God with all one's heart (Dt 6:4-5), Jesus adds a little-known precept from the Holiness code of Leviticus that one love one's neighbour as oneself (Lev 19:18). This addition, as I have suggested elsewhere, is explanatory¹⁷. Jesus uses Lev 19:18 (love neighbour) to interpret Dt 6:4f (love God). He thus gives a strikingly new direction to the great commandment of the Hebrew Bible. To love God with all one's heart, means, he says,

15. Hilary of Poitiers, *On Psalm 51*, No. 16. in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers, Volume I* (Bangalore. TPI. 1984) n. 886a.

16. Athanasius, *Discourse against the Arians*, 2, 27, in Jurgens (n. 15 above) no. 762.

17. George Soares-Prabhu, "The Synoptic Love-Commandment: The Dimensions of Love in the Teaching of Jesus", *Jeevadhara* XIII/74 (1982) 85-103 (87-91).

to love one's neighbour as oneself. Love of God is thus joined inseparably to love of neighbour, so that Jesus' double commandment of love is not to be read as two commandments but as one¹⁸. Simply stated, one loves God by loving neighbour (Mt 22:34-40); one 'does good to' Jesus by doing good to the least of his brothers and sisters in need (Mt 25:31-46). The 'secularization' of religion could scarcely go further! Because the Word has become flesh, we encounter the Word in and through 'flesh'.

c) Cosmic implications: Gyn-ecology?

The anthropological implications of the Johannine *sūtra* (meeting God in human history) has not gone unnoticed in Christian theology and life, even if the pervasive individualism of bourgeois society may have hindered Western theology from appreciating its social and political implications fully. The enduring concern of the Christian churches for the poor, the outcast and the sick, shown in the staggering proliferation of the works of social service and health care that they have sponsored (an immense outpouring of concern unparalleled surely in the history of humankind) shows how effectively the anthropocentric love command of Jesus (love God by loving — that is, by 'doing good to' — neighbour) continues to animate his followers as a group. But if the anthropological consequences of the *sūtra* have been at least implicitly recognized, its cosmic implications, I believe, have not.

For Western theology's obsessive anthropocentrism has till recently largely blinded it to cosmic concerns. It is only now, when the insatiable and aggressive greed of bourgeois society (more destructive of human life and natural resources than any other in history) has boomeranged into a frightening ecological crisis that is threatening the existence of our planet — it is only now that theologians in the West have begun scurrying frantically to the Bible, in the hope of finding in its seemingly anthro-

18. Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God", in his *Theological Investigations, Volume Six* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1969) 223-49

pocentric and even androcentric pages, a saving 'gyn-ecology'¹⁹.

Will they be able to do this? Is it possible to elaborate a theology which respects the rights of women and fosters reverence for nature (cutting edges of the secularization process today) in a tradition which has explicitly affirmed the social and religious subordination of women to men (1 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:8-15; Eph 5:21-24; 1 Pet 3:1-6), and which openly legitimizes the instrumentalization of nature by humankind (Gen 1:28-29; Wis 9:2-3; Sir 17:2-5)? The answer is not obvious. Certainly there is much in the Bible to support women's liberation and of ecological concern. Gal 3:28 probably a fragment of an early baptismal liturgy, affirms the radical equality of male and female 'in Christ' — that is in the new eschatological existence entered into by the Christians at baptism. The relationship between humankind and the cosmos is very different in the second creation story of Genesis (Gen 2:4-25) from what it is in the first (Gen 1:1-26). For humankind is no longer to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living that moves upon the earth" (Gen 1:28). Instead 'Adam, is "put into the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Cosmic concerns meet us elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments too, and notably in the Johannine *sūtra*. For the 'Word' that becomes 'flesh' is the word through which "all things were made" (Jn 1:3). It has therefore from 'the beginning' an inbuilt relation to the cosmos; and when this Word becomes 'flesh' this inbuilt bond is, as it were, thickened. The Word that had given shape to the world of matter and of history now becomes a part of it.

By becoming flesh the Word enters into a world which the biblical tradition has nowhere stigmatized as evil, but explicitly assessed as 'good' (Gen 1:31). Indeed the material universe is described as the visible expression of the invisible beauty and power of God (the closest bibli-

19. Cf. Mary Daly, *Gyn-Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) which links the exploitation of nature to the oppression of women and looks for the redemption of our society in a movement which corrects both.

cal approximation to the basic Hindu metaphor of the world as 'body of God') in some Wisdom texts of the Old Testament, echoed by Paul (Wis 13:1-9; Sir 17:8; Rom 1:20). Paul also holds out to the material universe the hope of liberation in and through the liberation of humankind in Christ (Rom 8:18-23; 1 Cor 8:1-6; Col 1:1-29 Eph 1:1-14). And the Apocalypse of John, in the characteristic language of its genre, looks forward to a catastrophic renewal of the universe as 'a new heavens and a new earth', in which the whole of cosmic and human history will find its fulfilment (Apoc 21:1).

But these expressions of a 'cosmic theodicy' in Wisdom literature, or of a 'cosmic Christology' in Paul, or of a 'cosmic eschatology' in the Apocalypse, are marginal to the Bible, for which the material universe is important not in itself but merely as a backdrop to human history. History not nature is the basic category of biblical theology, and decisively shapes its world view. There is nothing, then, in biblical tradition to match the basic Buddhist-Jain attitude of reverence for life which looks to the welfare not just of humankind but of all living things; and which has inspired the stirring mission-command of the Buddha (so much more attractive to Indian sensibilities than the triumphalistic mission commands of the gospels!): "Go ye therefore on your journey for the profit of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the bliss of the many, for the welfare, the profit, the bliss of devas and mankind" (*Mahavagga*, I.xi.8). Neither is there anything in the Bible comparable to the Hindu experience of the universe as (to use a basic metaphor of Hinduism) 'the body of God' (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* III. vii. 3-23). This basic metaphor of the Hindu world-view identifies the cosmos as the visible manifestation of the unmanifest absolute, and so as an integrated 'whole', into which all else (including human history) must be fitted if it is to be rightly perceived²⁰.

Such a holistic understanding of the world is obviously missing in the Bible, which cannot understand the cos-

20. Cf. F. X. D'Sa, "Myth, History and Cosmes", *Jeevadhara* XIV/79 (1984) 9-26

mos without relativizing it, that is, subordinating it to human concerns. The ruthless exploitation of the universe by the Christian West, is, I believe, an inevitable result of such relativization. One cannot, then, hope to find in the biblical tradition a cure for the cancerous growth of irresponsible industrialization which is threatening to choke our planet to death. The anthropocentric tradition of the Bible allows little room for reverence for life, or for respect for nature to flourish! We arrive here at the limits of biblical tradition and are invited to 'pass over' (in John Dunne's use of the term)²¹ into other (Indian) traditions which might provide a cosmocentric corrective to the anthropocentric perspectives of biblical religion.

Conclusion

In his Riddell Memorial Lectures of 1969, published under the startling but appropriate title of *Dialectical Christianity and Christian Materialism* (an obvious allusion to the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx)²², R. C. Zaehner has argued that post-patristic Christianity has failed to do justice to the Johannine *sūtra*:

Ever since Augustine Western Christendom has been false to the obvious meaning of the Incarnation. Like the Manichees whose dualism he never escapes, like the Buddhists, the Platonists, and all that is held to be highest and most noble in religion, Augustine renounced the world, and the flesh, thereby putting asunder what God had joined together in Christ — matter and Spirit — the flesh and the Word.

The indictment, I believe, is over-stated. Christian tradition has never quite dissolved the unity of the Word and the flesh, or of matter and Spirit, for if it were to do so it would cease to be Christian. Yet it remains true that the Christian understanding of the Johannine *sutra* has often

21. Dunne (n. 14 above) ix: "Passing over is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion. It is followed by an equal and opposite process we might call 'coming back', coming back with new insight into one's own culture, one's own way of life, one's own religion".

22. Zaehner (n. 1 above) 10

been (and continues to be) distorted, because it is always tempted to cling to one or other pole of the word-flesh dialectic (generally the spiritual pole), to the neglect of the other. But a properly dialectical Christianity will strive to hold both poles together in their mutual connectedness and integrity.

To say, then, that the Johannine *sūtra* proclaims the sacred in the secular does not mean that the sacred is reduced to the secular (or the secular absorbed into the sacred), as if God were to be identified with the processes of nature or of history. Rather the *sūtra* holds that God is to be encountered as God (and so as the transcendent ground of our being and eschatological fulfilment of our hope) in nature and in history, both of which have been desacralized by the Bible and established in the autonomy of the secular²³. The sacred then is not identified with the secular but is 'located' in it. The sacred and the secular while distinct are not separate. We cannot in the Christian tradition distinguish a sacred area in our world from a secular one; for it is precisely this which Jesus forbids when he re-draws the purity lines of Jewish society, and declares all things clean (Mk 7:1-23)²⁴. Everything, then, is sacred and everything is secular. For sacred and secular are not two distinct realities, but two aspects, two dimensions, two levels of the same one world. The sacred interpenetrates the secular (as the soul interpenetrates the body), and is accessible only through it. This is ultimately the message of the Johannine *sūtra*. We do not separate the sacred and the secular. We reach God through our secular activity — our involvement in the personal and political history of humankind and in our caring of the cosmos. The Word which has become flesh continues to dwell among us.

De Nobili College
Pune - 411 014

George M. Soares-Prabhu

23. Cox (n. 8 above) 31-50

24. Jerome Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel", *Semeia* 35 (1986) 91-128

The Complementarity of the Sacred and Secular in the Prophetic Tradition

In the Old Testament prophetic thought, as in the Old Testament as a whole, the secular and the sacred are not two unrelated or separate domains or entities. On the contrary, they are interrelated, inseparable and complementary. This point does not require any debate. It is self-evident. However, what is not so obvious is the nature of the relationship between the sacred and the secular. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the interrelationship between these two realities in the teaching of the O.T prophets.

The above statement does not mean that the Prophets do not make a clear distinction between the sphere of this world and the divine sphere or between the human and the divine. The unknown prophet of the exile brings out the contrast between the two realities:

"The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the Word of our God will stand for ever." (Is 40:8)

What is implied in this text is that the phenomenon of this world as a whole, especially world empires, great emperors, their supremacy and exercise of power have only limited duration and are time-bound, whereas that which has permanence is the reality of God. God's will and purposes will prevail whereas the secular is temporal and transitory. The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the limited physical strength of the Egyptians and their horses in sharp contrast to the power of God:

"The Egyptians are men, and not God;

and their horses are flesh, and not spirit." (Is 31:3)

The prophets also point out the contrast in the thinking and outlook of mankind from that of God. On the one hand they spoke of the otherness of God. On the other hand they also recognised the human sinfulness displayed in the crimes committed by people against one another and consequently this perversity in human thought and behaviour is pointed out by the prophets frequently in sharp contrast. The theme of the image of God in the human species is hardly touched upon by the prophets (cf. Is 55:8.9).

Surely, the prophets would have shared the prevalent views regarding what was holy and what was defiled, what was sacred and what was profane. That which belonged to the domain of God was regarded as sacred, namely, shrines and temples, the temple place, the temple objects, temple personnel, firstlings, special times and seasons, etc. They would have also subscribed to the purificatory rites and the precautions to be taken for approaching God or handling what was sacred. But the most striking feature of the prophetic teaching is that, according to them, the profanation of God's holiness does not happen because of the lack of observation of the customary purification rites, but rather in the criminal and immoral conduct of the worshippers. Oppression of the poor and perverting their justice, indulging in pagan fertility rites to ensure material blessings are all acts of defilement and desecration. In other words, sacredness is to be seen in a particular kind of conduct in what we would today call as secular. Holiness is not to be sought in the temple or in sacred objects alone but also in the dealings of people with one another and holding on to the faith in God who directs history and controls the universe.

The major part of the prophetic oracles in the pre-exilic period is devoted to exposing the crimes of the leaders, the rich and the powerful against the poor, the oppressed, the orphans and widows. Acquiring wealth through unjust means, thereby making others slaves and poor, upsetting the ancient norms for reaching fair decision in the law courts, cheating and bribery, the reign of un-

restricted power and terrorism etc. are all condemned by the prophets as acts of aggression against the holy God. The holy God's just wrath is kindled against the unjust who oppress those who are unable to defend themselves. It is the vision of the holy God which gives the prophets this awareness of the sins in the secular realm:

"The Lord Sabaoth is exalted in justice,
and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness."
(Is 5:16)

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth
the whole earth is full of his glory." (Is 6:13)

In this way the secular is drawn into the sphere of the sacred, so that no realm of life remains outside the divine purview.

Another dimension in the teaching of the prophets is that the sacredness, especially of the temple, the priests, the worship and the other religious rites is not an inherent, autonomous or permanent quality. They remain sacred only as long as they really continue to be true symbols of the presence of the holy God in the midst of the people. Their sacredness is lost through the crimes committed by the worshippers and are given over to be destroyed. Amos foretells the destruction of the ancient and venerated shrines of Bethel and Gilgal (5:4-7). Hosea pronounces judgement on the priests (4:4-6). Jeremiah says that the Temple will be spared only if the people's life conform to the norms of justice and righteousness (ch. 7). The idea that a sacred place, the dwelling place of the deity can be destroyed was unimaginable to those who held the 'orthodox' view that the dwelling place of God was indestructible.

It is the content of the prophetic idea of holiness which is the real link between the sacred and the secular in Hebrew prophecy. Holiness no doubt retained its ancient and widely prevalent associations of power, otherness, awesomeness, danger etc.

However the concept received new content, especially in Isaiah. Isaiah calls God as the Holy One of Israel.

Further, the characteristic features of the holy city of Jerusalem is that justice and righteousness should dwell in her.

The title, "the Holy one of Israel" seems to be a contradiction. In sharp contrast to the qualities and attributes of the secular, 'holy' is an attribute restricted to the deity indicating the 'otherness', the distance from the secular, the splendour etc. of the Godhead. In adding the genitive 'of Israel' to 'the Holy One' Isaiah was bringing together an aspect of the patriarchal religion whereby God is closely associated with the ancestors and to the concept of the Holy. To Isaiah the deity does not remain any more a mystery, unknown or unknowable, but is closely related to the people and to the secular reality. The sacred and the secular are brought into a mutual relationship when the people accept the just laws of the Holy God and demonstrate them in the secular realm.

Justice and righteousness are two qualities which bind together the sacred and the secular in Isaiah. Justice and righteousness are both gifts of God conferred to the holy city and they are also the demands made by God from the people who live in the holy city (Is 28:16-17; Is 1:21-26). These two terms occur in this order in the primary passages of Amos and Isaiah. The former term 'justice' has the meaning of a just order, the process of restoring it, a just verdict etc. whereas the latter term implies the concrete expression of justice in a just action. We are here dealing with situations of day to day life in the secular realm. Justice and righteousness are both sacred and secular at the same time.

Nothing is perhaps more secular than the daily needs of food, clothing and shelter. Whereas most ancient cultures performed various religious and magical rites to ensure the steady supply of these, the Hebrew prophetic thought freed these natural resources from the power of the unknown and regarded them as gifts of God and as a process in nature itself. There was no longer need to appease any deity or regard the earth itself as a deity.

The ploughing and sowing, the growth and the yield are understood as natural processes on the one hand and yet brought within the providence of a caring and loving God (Hos 2:8, contrast v. 5; 2:21; Is 28:23-29). However, the earth and its resources are not regarded as autonomous but dependent on the obedience of mankind to God and his laws (Amos 1:2; 5:10-11; Is 1:19).

United Theological College
Bangalore - 560 046

E. C. John

The Secular as Basis of the Sacred in Wisdom Literature

To speak of 'secular' and 'sacred' in the context of Wisdom literature seems, at first, rather odd and incongruous. It is somewhat like wanting to distinguish between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural' in physical science. In natural science the oddity comes from exclusion rather than inclusion: only physical elements are analysed so that spiritual or meta-empirical data are immaterial! For the faithful Jews, the right order of things had been established by God and there was nothing that escaped the influence of the divine. Therefore nothing could be called profane or 'secular'.

Nevertheless, the topics treated in the sapiential books are, compared to the Torah and the prophetic literature, much more of a so-called 'secular' nature. The great religious themes are practically absent: the covenant, the election of Abraham, the cult or the messianic expectation are more or less ignored. In Proverbs, Israel is not even mentioned, while 'Adam', as the head of mankind, occurs 33 times. The wise men were not concerned with the community or the history of the nation but with life and the daily problems of the individual. As G. von Rad puts it, "friend and foe, body and life, love and suffering" are the themes treated in these books.

Job grapples with the problem of suffering and retribution. Qohelet describes his own quest for happiness. The Canticle is a collection of songs in praise of human love. Proverbs deal with correct social behaviour. The Deuteronomical books are, at least in part, more 'religious'

and nationalistic. But the first 42 chapters of Ben Sira are not very different from the Proverbs and the first five chapters of Wisdom try to pry beyond death into individual survival and immortality, while the next five describe Solomon's personal quest for, and intimate relations with Lady Wisdom.

Before trying to define the main objective of the sapiential authors and the relation between wisdom and the divine, let us examine one or two major themes: the attitude of the wise men towards riches and poverty and the type of love which is praised in the Canticle.

A. Riches and Poverty

There are numerous passages referring to riches and poverty in the Wisdom books, but it is practically impossible to draw a clear-cut message from them because these collections of sayings belong to different ages, draw their experience from different strata of society and are addressed to different groups of people.

The prologue of Proverbs, v.g., is the product of the school and directed to the elite. These more recent sayings will point out the cause of poverty and describe the dire consequences of it, so that the reader may avoid such a wretched state and avert the danger of falling from his privileged position.

Other collections gather older material of tribal wisdom and family traditions, popular proverbs describing the harsh reality of experienced poverty, with a certain sarcasm or a sad surrender to fate.

Other sayings have a more definite audience, restricted to the royal court. They are intended as advice to the king and his officials, or those who aspire to such political position.

We shall reflect on a few aspects of riches and poverty.

1. The harsh reality

It is rather significant that the Hebrew word for poor, 'rāsh' (destitute, in want) is not the most frequently used

in the Bible (21 times). 'Anaw-im', which occurs more often (92 times), denotes affliction: one who is oppressed, bent exploited. "Ebyon" (61 times) too expresses alienation: one, who is willing, consents because he is deprived of any resource. An other synonym, 'dal' (48 times) refers to one who is languishing, weak, vulnerable.

The plight of the poor is described in all its facets: insecurity, shameful destitution, exploitation, bonded labour... It all sounds so familiar even after more than two thousand years !

'The security of a man's life is his wealth, but the destitute has no way to survive' (Prov 13:8; according to some interpretations the second part could also mean, 'the destitute sees no threat' because he has nothing to lose!).

'When a rich man takes a wrong step, his friends are there to steady him, but when a poor man collapses, he is just pushed aside and even blamed for it!' (Sir 13:21)

'A rich man's wealth is his stronghold, but the poverty of the weak is his undoing' (Prov 10:15).

'When there are no oxen, there might be some cattle-feed in the manger, but abundant crops come from the strength of an ox!' (Prov 14:4)

'It is better to die than live the life of a beggar. If a man has to keep looking with envy at another man's table, such a life is not worth living!' (Sir 40:28f)

'The poor may extract much food from a barren plot, but it is swept away by injustice!' (Prov 13:23)

'The rich lords it over the poor; he who borrows becomes the slave of the lender'. (Prov 22:7)

Still more painful than the destitution of the poor is the attitude of their fellow human beings. No one respects their dignity. They are humiliated, abused, disliked, shunned and ostracized !

'The poor man pleads and entreats, but the rich answers harshly' (Prov 18:23). 'A rich man does wrong and even adds insults; a poor man is wronged and must still apologize!' (Sir 13:3)

'Wealth brings many friends but a man without resources is deserted. The destitute is disliked even by his neighbours...his own brothers hate him'. (Prov 19:4 and 7, 14:20)

However, there are some proverbs questioning the relation between wealth and happiness, especially when quickly acquired. Riches may foster illusion, showing off and rivalry !

'A property quickly acquired in the beginning will not be blessed at the end' (Prov 20:21). 'A rich man (only) imagines that his wealth is a strong city and a high protecting wall' (Prov 18:11).

'Better a dish of vegetables with love and attention; than a fatted calf and hatred to go with it !' (Prov 15:17' cf. 17:1)

2. Those who have only themselves to blame

Among the causes of poverty the most frequently mentioned are laziness and sloth: 'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands, and poverty is at door' (Prov 6:10f and 24:33f). 'Idleness puts a man to sleep, the slothful will go hungry!' (=9:15).

At times idleness is contrasted to hard work, which leads to prosperity. 'He who loves sleep will know poverty. Keep your eyes open and you will have enough and to spare' (20:13)! 'An industrious hand will take hold of the helm, but the slack hand will be put to hard labour' (12:24 also 10:4). 'A slothful hunter will have no prey to roast but the diligent will be prosperous' (Prov 12:27).

Some are kept away from serious work by wild dreams, unrealistic aspirations or spoil everything by thoughtless haste. 'The lazy one is torn asunder by unfulfilled appetites but the diligent sees his desires satisfied (Prov 13:4). 'He who tills the land will have bread enough and to spare but he who chases fantasies and follows worthless pursuits has no sense' (Prov 12:11). 'A hardworking man is thoughtful and knows abundance, but too much haste leads to want' (Prov 21:5).

Laziness easily leads to other mischief. Lack of virtue

is on its own one of the causes of poverty. 'The way of the sluggard is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the righteous is an open highway' (Prov 15:19). 'Yahweh pulls down the house of the proud. He who is greedy for unjust gain brings trouble on his household, but he who hates a bribe will live' (Prov 15:25 and 27). 'The virtuous has enough to satisfy his hunger but the stomach of the wicked goes empty' (Prov 13:25).

Drunkenness too can lead to destitution. Especially those in authority are advised to abstain from liquor. On the other hand it is a means to drown one's sorrow and the mother of king Lemuel does not seem to realize that it can become a vicious circle. 'The glutton and the drunkard will come to poverty and drowsiness clothes a man with rags' (Prov 23:21). 'The ruler who drinks forgets what was decreed and perverts the right of the afflicted'. 'Give the strong drink to those in bitter distress, so that they forget their misfortune and remember their misery no more' (Prov 31:5 and 7).

3. Those oppressed and exploited

Though they may have been initially at fault, the poor are often kept in destitution through the injustice of others, even those in authority. 'A brood, whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are knives, devour the *anawim* from off the earth and the *ebyonim* from among men' (Prov 30:14). 'Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over the powerless' (Prov 28:15).

'If in a province you see the poor being oppressed and the right of the just being violated, do not be astonished: the high official has to please the one still higher and above them all there is the king to be taken care of' (Qoh 5:8, also 4:1). 'The wicked destroys the hut of the destitute and steals other people's houses instead of building his own' (Job 20:19).

4. Riches and righteousness

Experience has shown that riches is not always the source of happiness. It is often connected with wickedness, empty boasting and pride rather than with integrity. Right-

eousness is more desirable than wealth!

'Better a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice'. 'Better be of lowly spirit with the poor, than divide spoil with the proud' (Prov 16:8 and 19; also 19:1 and 28:6).

In a neighbour one will appreciate more his faithfulness and loyalty than his ill-acquired assets. 'What is desired is loyalty: a poor man is better than a liar' (Prov 19:22). 'A faithful man will abound with blessings, but quickly earned property does not go unpunished' (Prov 22:16).

'He who trusts in riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like an ever green leaf' (Prov 11:28).

In fact, behind the rich man's boast there is plenty of shame, blind illusion or covering up for plenty of worries. Riches is at best a mixed blessing. 'A rich man is wise in his own eyes but the poor sensible man sees through his bluff' (Prov 28:20). 'Better a little, with fear of the Lord, than rich treasures with plenty of trouble' (Prov 15:16). 'The blessing of Yahweh may bring wealth but with it there is no end of "travail" (Prov 10:22 alluding to Eve's labour-pains in Gn 3:16).

The classic text on poverty and riches is that of the golden mean: 'O Lord, give me neither poverty nor riches, grant me only the morsel of bread I need, lest I abound in plenty and fall away from you, or, in destitution, take to stealing and so disgrace your name' (Prov 30:8f).

5. Duties to the destitute

Although there is no explicit mention of a covenanted community, the sapiential books admit the 'rights of the poor' (Prov 29:7), enforced by a commandment. Those who refuse to help the needy are committing a sin, insult God and deserve punishment.

'For commandment's sake help a poor man in his need, do not send him away empty-handed' (Sir 29:9). 'He who despises his neighbour is a sinner, happy the one who is kind to the poor' (Prov 14:21). 'He who oppresses

the poor insults his Maker, he who generously helps the needy honours Him' (Prov 14:31 and 17:5a).

People are exhorted to give graciously, they will be rewarded with blessings. If they grudge and deny their help, the destitute will bring a curse on them.

'Give alms from possessions to all who live uprightly, don't let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it' (Tob 4:7)! 'He who has bountiful eyes is blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor' (Prov 22:9). 'Stretch your hand to the needy and your blessing will be complete' (Sir 7:32). 'He who is kind to the weak, lends to the Lord, who will repay him for his deeds' (Prov 19:17).

'He who gives to the destitute will not want, he who hides his eyes will get many a curse' (Prov 28:27). 'One will give freely and grow richer, another be stingy, refuse to help, and suffer want' (Prov 11:24). 'He who closes his ear to the cry of the weak, will himself cry out and not be heard' (Prov 21:13). 'Do not refuse help to the poor, the needy, the hungry and the beggar. If in his bitterness he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer' (Sir 4:1-6, cf. also Elihu in Job 34:28).

In the more recent books, the idea of almsgiving becomes prominent. It is compared to a sacrifice of praise or enhances the value of prayer but more often the purpose is rather self-centred: atonement for one's sins or escape from troubles and trials.

'Prayer with fasting and almsgiving and right conduct is better than riches with iniquity' (Tob 12:8). 'By showing gratitude a man makes an offering of fine flour, by giving alms a sacrifice of praise' (Sir 35:2). 'Store up almsgiving in your treasure house and it will save you from every affliction' (Sir 29:12). 'Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins' (Sir 3:29).

One of the virtues of the industrious, ideal wife is her generosity to the poor (Prov 31:20). In Job too we find several series of works of mercy towards the weak and needy. Refuting the detailed accusation of Eliphaz (Job 22.

6-9), Job describes his previous conduct: "I was the eye for the blind, the feet for the lame, a father for the 'ebyon... I broke the fangs of the oppressor and made him drop his prey from his teeth" (Job 29:12-17)! In his oath of exculpation we read, "If I infringed the rights of any of my servants... If I was insensible to the desire of the indignant... If I raised my hand against the orphan... let my shoulder fall from its socket and my arm be crushed at the joint!" (Job 31:16-22)

6. God's attitude towards the poor

In time of distress, in spite of a traditional faith in God's goodness there is a keen experience of his lack of concern, a certain resentment, rarely expressed, and if so: only by the elite, as v.g. by the author of Job:

'Wicked Men move boundaries, take the widow's ox as security... out of pity for their own starving children the destitute must do the harvest in the oppressor's fields, go about half naked and hungry while carrying the sheaves... the fatherless child is snatched from the breast and taken in pledge. In the town one hears the groan of the dying and the gasp of the wounded, crying for help. But God is deaf to their appeal!... The selfish man keeps a barren woman but refuses to give a child to his brother's widow... When the mighty themselves despair of life, God prolongs it and gives them security. If it is not so, who will prove me a liar! Who will show that my words make no sense?" (Job 24:2f, 6-12, 21-25).

Other texts state that all are equal before their Maker. One's financial assets do not make any impression on the Almighty. He remains impartial for rich and poor alike.

'The rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of both, gives light to the eyes of both' (Prov 22:2 and 29:13). 'In the days of prosperity be joyful, in the days of adversity remember that both situations come from God, so that man may not find fault with him' (Job 2:10) 'God shows no partiality to princes or regard the rich better than the poor: both are the work of his hands' (Job 34:19).

The same 'impartiality' is found in the sermon on

the mountain: 'Your Father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, sends his rain on the just and the unjust! (Mt 5:45)

But in many cases God is really the only refuge, the only redeemer (*go'el*) of the poor. He rescues them and takes up their cause.

'Efforts to get out of destitution by one's self are futile but the eyes of the Lord look upon the weak and the needy, to lift him up and raise his head' (Sir 11:11-13). 'The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries' (Prov 15:25). 'Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the field of the orphan: their Redeemer is strong, he will plead their cause against you' (Prov 23:10f, also 22:22f). 'God saves the fatherless and the needy, He shuts the mouth of injustice' (Job 5:15f).

The wisdom books have clearly expressed the harsh reality of poverty, the need of a social order and the rights of the oppressed, but also man's utter helplessness in the face of injustice and disaster. At times, even God seems to be indifferent to the plight of the poor. But beside all these various experiences there is a deep faith in God's providence and an inner conviction that he will see to it that justice prevails.

B. Intimacy of Love

The greatest problem posed by the Canticle is not so much what the author has written but what different interpreters have read into it!

The first impression one gets from this collection of poems is that they describe two young people who are deeply in love with each other. The editors of modern translations have attributed parts to the young man and woman, the bride and the groom, leaving the rest to a choir, the daughters of Jerusalem. But this does not by itself make the Canticle into an operetta.

There is no real plot. Whether we attribute v. 6:12 to the young woman, 'I did not know what was happening to me, he made me feel shy although a daughter of noble

birth' (splitting up morekbath), or to the man, 'she made me feel more than a prince, in charge of the chariots of my people', neither version provides a foundation for a kidnapping scene by Solomon's soldiers. Moreover, a drama presupposes impersonification and was as such taboo in Israel.

1. Natural interpretation

A much more plausible interpretation, already proposed by J. C. Wetzstein in 1868, is an anthology of songs within the framework of a marriage celebration. The comparison of the Syrian wasf — a lyrical description of the physical beauty of the partner — with some passages of the Canticle is rather convincing. 'You are beautiful my beloved, your head is a cup of crystal. Your hair is dark as the night, flowing in waves, strong as the ropes used by women drawing water at the well, full of perfume. Your forehead is like the crescent of the moon, your eyebrows are moon-shaped like the letter 'nun'. Your mouth is a ring of crystal, your teeth a necklace of pearls... Your saliva is pure as honey. Your chest vaulted as the vessels sailing for Sidon. Your arms are two swords drawn out of the sheath, your legs columns of marble...' The descriptions of the Canticle are strikingly similar: 'You are beautiful my love... your hair is like a herd of goats rushing down the slopes of Gilead, your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes to be shorn, having just been washed, all of them twins and no one missing... your lips are a scarlet thread and your mouth is lovely. Your breasts are two fawns, the twins of a gazelle' (Cant 4:1-7). 'Your palate has the taste of exquisite wine, flowing down smoothly, spreading over lips and teeth...' (cf 7:1-9). 'His locks are wavy, black as a raven... his arms are rounded gold set with jewels... his legs alabaster columns set upon bases of gold...', (Cant 5:10-16).

On the other hand; the idea of a sword dance in Cant 6:13f (Hb 7:1), is much too far-fetched: 'Turn around, turn around, Shulamite (=shady one!), turn that we may gaze upon you'. And the young man retorts 'Why should you gaze upon the Shulamite, as on one performing bet-

ween two rows of dancers'.

What is most amazing is the fact that marriage, as a contract or covenant is never mentioned in the book. There is no allusion to children or procreation, except perhaps in 7:2b: Your womb (abdomen) is a heap of wheat, surrounded by anemones'. The father, who normally plays an important part in choosing the partner, is never spoken of.

Right from the start, there is a longing for the partner's presence and for the intimacy of love, 'Smother me with the kisses of your mouth! your love is more intoxicating than wine, your name more fragrant than scented oil — *shemen... shemeka* (1:2f).

The recurring refrain is a plea for undisturbed privacy when she is 'faint with love'... his left arm under her head, his right embracing her, both ready for full surrender, 'I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and the hinds of the field, not to stir or arouse the beloved until her own delight!' (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) The Hebrew for gazelles and hinds — *sebaoth* and *ayeloth* — sound somewhat similar to *Sabhaoth* and *Eloha*, a playful allusion to an oath by all that is lovely and free.

The dialogue is full of such metaphors which only love can inspire. In his eyes she is 'My dove, my perfect one' (6:9 cfr also 5:2). She is 'an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed', referring to privacy and mutual fidelity (4:12). 'You have ravished my heart with one wink of your eye, one jewel of your necklace' (4:9)! 'You are beautiful, my love: your glances are irresistible, piercing like arrows (Hb: terrible as an army)... Turn those eyes away from me! they dazzle me!' (6:4f) The choir echoes his feelings 'Fair as the moon, bright as the sun, irresistible, with glances piercing like arrows!' (6:10)

She compares herself to an asphodel, an anemone (2:1 rather than rose and lily), and speaks of him as a gazelle, a young stag (2:9) upon the mountains of 'bether' (2:17). Bether, i. e., separation, is probably not a real geographical place but an allusion to the cleavage of her own breasts,

'He brought me to the banquetting hall and looked at me with such endearing glances... Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with (love-)apples, I am faint with love!' (2:4f) 'My beloved is mine and I am his, he browses among the anemones... and his desire is for me alone!' (2:16; 6:3; 7:10)

There are some daring descriptions, bordering on the erotic, as v. g. the day dreaming of the young woman: I slept but my heart kept awake... Listen! My beloved is knocking... 'Open to me, darling, my love, my dove, my perfect one! My head is drenched with dew, my hair with moisture of the night. I have already removed my coat, washed the dirt from my feet!...' When my beloved slipped his hand through the latch-hole, I felt the thrilling through my whole body. I arose to open to him, my hands were moist with myrrh when my fingers ran over the knobs of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but he had turned away... vanished...! (5:2-6) There is no need of any special research to find out the type of locks and bolts used in ancient Palestine!

Some short passages are not so well integrated into the context and may be parts of a song not quoted in full, v. g. 'Catch us the little foxes that spoil the vineyard, our vineyard is in flower!' (2:15) The word for foxes - 'shu 'alim' - connotes those entering a hole and the root h-b-l has a double meaning: to spoil or to impregnate! The blossoming is obviously puberty and there are no such foxes as eat the flower of the vine. It is probably the mother who asks her sons to protect the girl against eve-teasers now that she is grown-up.

We have another such song in 8:8-10. 'Our sister is still small, her breasts are not yet formed. What shall we do when her courtship begins? If she is a wall (well-behaved and strong-willed), we'll build upon it a silver parapet (praise her virtue), but if she be a door (flirting and making advances), we will reinforce it with planks of cedar (keep a close watch on her doings)! ' It is perhaps a teasing reminiscence of earlier years, but she is ready with her retort: 'I am a wall and my breasts are like towers... to the eyes of my lover, I can give full satisfaction! '

Although the tone is, at times, playful and the theme deals with the greatest intimacy of human love, the style remains refined and poetic and the symbolism tactful and dignified.

2. Religious interpretation

No one should be astonished that most of the commentators try to go beyond the natural interpretation and look for a more religious, more 'sacred' meaning.

Taking their clue from the marriage symbolism of the prophets, especially Hos. 2 and Ezech 16 and 23, some exegetes consider the Canticle as an allegory symbolizing the historical relation between covenantal Israel and Yahweh. But in this case, every single detail has to be given a transferred meaning and, for our book, this seems to lead to absurdity. Verse 1:5, 'I am swarthy — suntanned — but nevertheless beautiful!' would refer to the Babylonian exiles before Cyrus' liberation in 539 BC. Verse 3:6, 'What is this procession coming up in a column of dust, fragrant with myrrh and frankincense?' would describe the arrival of the first batch of returnees under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a Solomon redivivus! The legs of the bridegroom, columns of alabaster (5:15) create some problem. In fact, the whole anthropomorphic description of Yahweh is highly unorthodox. So, they should symbolize Boaz and Yachin, the two columns of the temple portico (1 Kg 7:21)! As for the 'wasf' of 7:2-6, the sandals are the exodus, the curve of the girl's hip is the Mediterranean coast, the navel is Jerusalem (cf Ezech 39:12), and the abdomen is the mountain of Juda at the 50th Km on the road from Jerusalem to Nazareth!

A. Robert thinks it impossible to give a natural interpretation to passages like 3:6-8. 'Instead of being the vulgar picture of a wedding procession, it is the expression of eschatological and messianic hope!' (Cf. *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, Gabalda, Paris 1963 pg. 168) One could ask what vulgarity there is in a dignified description of a wedding party! Such far-fetched historical allegorism is the result of a deep-rooted taboo, preventing people

to speak about human love in an uninhibited way. For the Jews of the time, there was no dichotomy between the so-called 'profane' and the 'religious'.

However, there have been deeply spiritual commentaries of the Canticle written by people who had reached a high degree of prayer and a truly mystical union with the Divine Master. Their experience was so intense that it was well-nigh ineffable. But they felt perfectly at home with the lyrical expressions of the Canticle. The writings of a St Bernard or a St Cyril of Alexandria are perhaps not meant for ordinary readers: the two breasts are the two commandments of love, the lock of hair is the abundant multitude of the saints, the navel is the mirror of the soul etc. etc... Jesus told us not to throw pearls to the pigs and not every one can appreciate these mystical jewels. Yet, they are much more genuine than the historical acrobacies of covenantal allegories.

Hosea and Ezechiel described the infidelities of God's people, the adulterous Israel. That symbolism is based on Hosea's experience of a broken marriage with Gomer who possibly left him to become a prostitute at a shrine of Ba'al after bearing *him* a first son (Hos 1:3). But there is nothing of the kind in the Canticle. It describes a chaste and unsullied surrender of two young people in love. It is therefore best interpreted as the relation between two individual persons and any allegorical or parabolic interpretation which tries to identify the bride with a whole community, Israel or the Christian Church, sounds forced and constrained.

The best text to show the secular as basis of the sacred is the so-called key passage of the whole book: 8:6f. Keep me as a seal upon your heart, as a stamp impressed on your arm. Love is as irresistible as death, passionate love as strong as the instinct to live! It is a fire flashing flames, divine flames (i.e., flames of Yahu). Many waters can not quench its ardour, no flood can wash it away! A man carried his seal, his most precious possession, around his neck, hanging on his heart. But the seal can

also close the heart to other affections, 'seal' it, and the young girl can influence the lover, i.e., put her stamp on his arm so that he fully and exclusively belongs to her. The irresistible force of love is a 'flame of Yahu', something divine.

The depth and intensity of chaste love exceeds the realm of the human, it is in a real sense a gift of God; while mystical, personal union with the Divine can only be expressed by comparing it to the ecstasy of true human love.

C. Search for lasting values

Judging from the preface of Proverbs, the aim of the author(s) was rather ill-defined and hazy and the notion of wisdom so fluid that it can be stretched at will: 'that man may come to know *wisdom* (hokmah) and *discipline* (musar), understand truths seen by *intuition* (binah)... receive *instruction* (musar) in *wise conduct* (Haskel) and in what is right and just and honest. May *resourcefulness* ('ormah) *be imparted to the simple, *knowledge* (da'at) and *discretion* (mezimmah) to the young. Let a wise man hear and advance in *learning* (leqah), a man of *intelligence* (nabon) gain *wise counsel* (tahbuloth)!' (Prov 1:1-5).

It would be futile to analyse each synonym and find the specific connotation of each term, but this variety clearly underscores the difficulty of defining the ideal which wisdom literature wants to project.

Dianne Bergant C.S.A. (in, *What are they saying about Wisdom Literature?* Paulist Press, NY, 1984) has made an excellent survey of the most important works on the topic and much of what follows is derived from the first chapter of that book.

For G. von Rad, the sapiential ideal consists in the practical knowledge of the laws of life and the world. Man has to discover the 'order' in nature and in human behaviour, so as to live in harmony with it. This knowledge is based on direct experience, without concern for the covenant or any salvific facts. But it presupposes that the order in nature and in human life is basically one, a

kind of cosmic order in the sense of the Egyptian *Ma'at* or the Vedic *Rta-Varuna*. In the struggle between the two antagonistic powers of good and evil, correct social behaviour requires us to subdue the latter so as to set the former free. We shall return later on, to his notion of wisdom and to its limitation.

According to R. N. Whybray, the aim is more pragmatic. The question is how to cope with life and to be successful in the process. Wisdom is an innate intelligence of a general kind, 'shrewdness', a natural endowment which some persons possess in greater measure than others. If one is born with this ability and gifted with this insight, he can further advance and acquire a still greater skill, but one cannot begin from scratch! It is manifested in the deft performance of some difficult tasks, the aesthetic accomplishment of artistic creation, a cultivated habit of appropriate behaviour and the penetrating clarity of astute advice. The wise has a certain set of ideas, an attitude to life which gives it meaning and leads to happiness.

James Crenshaw accepts the same cosmic order: a kind of design or purpose that can and must be discovered and accepted in order to live in peace and harmony. But he insists also on distinct types of wisdom according to different circles and background: the nature-wisdom of the clan or family, the practical and juridical wisdom of the court, and the speculative or theological wisdom from the school of the scribes.

Moreover, he wants due place to be given to the Divine. Wisdom is 'the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationship with things, people and the Creator' (*Studies in Ancient Israel Wisdom*, NY, 1976, p. 484). In the theophany of Job 38-41, God does not argue with the sufferer, but leaves it to his creation to bear witness in his favour. Creation, with its unfathomable mysteries is in itself a defence of the wisdom and power of the Creator, who cannot be limited by human standards of justice and retribution.

R. Murphy insists that wisdom literature is concerned with human conduct and not so much with the order of

nature. Examples from nature are only brought in as illustration or for the sake of comparison, but not in order to fuse the physico-animal world with the human into one cosmic order, as the Egyptian *Ma'at* and the Hindu all-inclusive view of the universe. Though world order is the product of the wisdom and power of the Creator, God himself is not subject to it. There is no absolute determinism and Job's accusation of capriciousness in Yahweh is baseless. Wisdom is the effort to put order in human life and to cope with both the world order and the freedom of God.

This brings us back to G. von Rad's idea of wisdom and its 'limits'. Wisdom is the fruit of experience. It is neither a divine attribute nor a personification of God but something implanted in creation, a divine mystery distinct from the other works of God (cf. Job 28). On the other hand, experience is always conditioned, limited, and there are therefore no predetermined results. There is no behaviour, no experience, no value that is completely unambiguous. The so-called cosmic order acquires so many ramifications that it is not fully predictable. Wisdom then is the mastering of the 'contingent', the art of reducing the sphere of the unforeseen, i.e., of the events which cannot be understood purely on the basis of the familiar. "Wisdom is not a body of experiential knowledge to be mastered and applied in situations of life, but the flexibility of mind that assists one in discerning the right time and the fitting place for the appropriate behaviour." (D. Bergant, p. 17)

But this knowledge of the appropriate time and place does not fully satisfy the quest of Qohelet. Even if there is a right time for everything, 'a time to be born and a time to die... a time to sleep and a time to laugh, a time to indulge in sexual pleasure, i.e., scattering stones (or seeds?) and a time to refrain from it.' etc. (3:1-8), God has only revealed to our mind the notion of 'continuity' (3:4 = '*olam* is not always eternity)! He did not disclose the way things came about nor the way they will end. The past and the future are not in our hands and we should therefore make

the best of the present which alone is within our reach. Qohelet can somehow get resigned to the limitations and uncertainties of human experience and keep his faith in God: 'Here is what seems the best to me: Let a man eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of his toil under the sun, during the limited days which God has granted him. For this is his lot!' (Qoh 5:17 - Hb 5:18)

Some proverbs echo the same theological tension among the scribes. 'All the actions a man does may seem right in his own eyes, but it is the Lord who judges our intentions!' (Prov 16:2) 'Man's steps are determined by the Lord, how can a man understand the direction he follows?'. (Prov 20:24)

Like every other mortals, the scribes were longing, for health, long life, progeny and remembrance, for wealth and honour. But experience showed that these values did not always follow righteous behaviour. Without faith and 'fear of the Lord', i.e., openness, docility, acceptance of his will, there is no true wisdom.

Conclusion

Compared to the prophetic writings and the Torah, wisdom literature may appear to be a secularization, a desacralization in the sense that the central themes are neither 'code, cult and creed' nor 'community and covenant', but rather the every-day problems of ordinary life.

Creation is not just the world and all that is in it. It is the work of His hands. Man faces a certain natural order which he somehow can recognize but he must also accept God's freedom who is above all and prevents man from thinking too high of himself. 'With God are strength and prudence... he sends counselors away barefoot and brings ridicule upon the judges.' (Job 12:16f also Is 10:15 and 29:14) In fact, to consider oneself wise seems a clear sign of folly. 'Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him!' (Prov 26:12) 'He who trusts in himself is a fool; he who walks in wisdom is safe' (Prov 28:6 also 3:5 and Sir 3:23).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that man should not use his God-given talents. His efforts can be fruitful when they are not arrogant and are blessed: 'It is by wise guidance that you wage war; victory is due to a wealth of counselors'. Remember also: 'The horse is equipped for the day of battle, but victory comes from the Lord!' (Prov 24:6 and 21:31) Ultimately man should propose, but at the end let God dispose (cf Prov 16:9).

Since it is all God's inscrutable plan, God's mysterious work, the wise man does not experience these limitations as oppressive. We are in His hands and He knows best. We can trust Him as a woman trusts her faithful husband and 'espouses' the will of her beloved. The 'fear' of the Lord, which is the backbone of wisdom (cf Sir 1:14-20), is a similar reverential surrender, and not some kind of servile scare of punishment. In Sir 2:15f it is even used as a parallel to love: 'Those who *fear* (revere) the Lord will not disobey His words; those who *love* Him keep His ways. Those who *fear* the Lord seek to please Him; those who *love* Him are filled with His law (=the expression of His wishes)!'

God may limit human planning, but He also carries men beyond the goal they envisaged (cf G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, p. 106). The field of our experience is restricted in time and space and cannot predict God's mysterious interventions. But if we accept the contingency of the human, the freedom of the Creator and the mystery of the beyond, the secular will lead us to the sacred and then there will be but a small step from this knowledge of God's world, this true wisdom, to the praise of Yahweh: 'Raise your voice to glorify the Lord... Exalt Him with renewed strength... though He is so Great, far beyond your power to praise!' (Sir 43:31f)

Sacralized Secularity in the Acts of the Apostles

Introduction

"And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:3). These words said about the creation of the world and the origin of everything in this world seem to present a backdrop to what is repeatedly affirmed in the book that portrays the origin of the Church, namely the Acts of the Apostles. It may not be a mere coincidence that both at the creation of the world and at its new creation in the Spirit, namely the Church, as painted in the Acts, that the concepts of both the Lordship of the creator and the goodness of creation and of created realities are simultaneously affirmed and authenticated.

The world is good

In the context and background of an extreme devaluation of this "present age" and an intense devotion to "the age to come", generated by the prolific apocalyptic literatures of the time¹, it is heartening to see the liberating form of desecularisation in the Acts through which the mute or open protest against the world and "this age" as a realm of moral degeneration, baseness and decay is, one might say, vehemently challenged. Not only is the radical discontinuity between the two ages denied but also the goodness and the beauty of this world defended and established.

The term *kosmos* (world) is variously understood by different N. T. writers. Paul would view the world in

¹ Harnack, E., *New Testament Apocrypha II* (Philadelphia, 1966), 536-59.

the tradition of the Apocalyptic, in strictly dualistic categories. The spirit of the world is opposed to the spirit of God (I Cor 2:12) and either of them is mutually exclusive². The world becomes "this world" (I Cor 3:19; 5:10) and "this age" (I Cor 2:6) with all the pejorative nuances of the Apocalyptic literature.

The seeds of the Johannine theology of the world are already sown in Paul. Though John uses the term *kosmos* to mean all created realities (cf 1:3-10), yet the apocalyptic colouring he gives to the use of the term "this world" (cf. 12:25-31; 13:1; 18:36 etc.) cannot but lead us to the conclusion that he is talking of the world and the world-era which are estranged from God. This concept becomes fixed and clear-cut as the central and focal point of the theology of John and at the same time distinguishes Johannine theology of the world from much of the other N. T. writings. The phrase "you are from below (this age, this world); I am from above" (age to come, the other world) sums up neatly the position of John (cf. 8:23) with regard to the world³.

The unique use of this word *kosmos*⁴ in Acts 17:24 needs to be examined in this context. We may call the whole pericope (17:24-28) a brief meditation on the creation narratives in Genesis. It is a hymn to the Lord of creation, as is found expressed in Ps 146:6; Is 37:16 etc. It is an affirmation of this created world as beautiful and good as is enunciated in Is 42:5-11. It is a revelation that instructs man that the way to God is in and through the world, as is found portrayed in Rom 1:19-21. The term *kosmos*, used in such a rich background not only absolves it from apocalyptic pessimism but also positively affirms its true worth and validity.

2. Cf. also I Cor 1:20-25 where the wisdom of this world is maintained as foolishness before God

3. Sasse, H; *Kosmos* TDNT III: 894.

4. We may not be wrong in surmising that perhaps because of the apocalyptic colouring that this term has acquired, the author of Acts is hesitant to use it oftener in this Book.

The term *kosmos* as used in the Acts comprises the whole universe, the sum of all the created beings. It denotes "the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them" (Acts 4:24; 14:15). In this meaning the use of *kosmos* is analogous to Jn 1:10 which confesses that "the world was made through him" (cf also Jn 1:3).

If the *kosmos* is the result of the activity of a benevolent creator then through the very same *kosmos*, man should come to know the creator. If then the vehicle of man's knowledge of the creator is the created world, then this created world itself must be good, tending always God-ward and leading man heaven-ward. Thus the fact that a very positive note is struck in the Acts with regard to all the created realities (cf Acts 4:24; 14:5; 17:24), is a plus-point for the author of Acts in the liberating process of desecularisation, which he is highlighting here. One experiences here in the Acts, the Hellenistic joy in the world as opposed to the Persian dualism which has left its stamp [in the Jewish apocalyptic pessimism⁵]. For the author of Acts as for the Greeks the *kosmos* is *kalos* the world is the epitome of all order and beauty; "to contemplate this beauty is bliss"⁶.

The times are good

If the term *kosmos* in the Acts embraces all that is good and beautiful from the point of view of space, namely creation in all its manifold splendour and glory, terms like *kairos*, *chronos* (time), *nyn*, *nyni* (now), *aion* (age) etc., reveal the meaning of time in all its varied richness.

Of the total 126 times the word-group of the term *kairos* is found in the N. T.⁷, roughly one third (42 times) belongs to Luke-Acts. Although a whole range of these *kairos* passages is used in a temporal sense and denotes simply time (longer or shorter) in the chronological scale (cf. Acts 7:20; 12:1; 19:23; Lk 8:13; 13:1; 18:10 etc), which is

⁵ Sasse, art. cit; 89f; cf also 868-880.

⁶ Cf. id; *ibid.*, 873-874

⁷ Cf. *eukairia* - opportune time, *eukairos* - convenient, *akairos* - untimely, *proskairos* - transitory etc.

already something positive, yet the whole of the time-scale itself is put under the goodness and sovereignty of God (cf Lk 19:44; Acts 1:7; 13:11) so much so that even in "the rains from heaven and fruitful seasons" (14:17) he does not leave himself unattested with the stamp of his goodness. He has not merely fixed the boundaries of the habitations of men (space), but also allotted the various and successive periods and seasons of the year (time), thus establishing himself as the master of everything created, *space and time* (cf 17:24-27). The *kairos* for a christian then is the *kairos* of Jesus, of the gracious goodness of God and his righteousness as revealed in Jesus Christ. It denotes the time (*chronos*) "the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us" (Acts 1:21). It points out to the time of repentance and conversion after the passing away of "the times (*chronoi*) of ignorance" (Acts 17:30). It is in fact something unique. The physical presence of Jesus (*chronos*) has bathed every concrete moment of time with the water of divine salvation (cf Lk 13:32; 19:5; 23:43) so much so the time (*chronos*) after this physical presence has become a time of grace and salvation (*kairos*). "Salvation has sought out its own time and its own place in the world (*chronos*) in order from there to transform time and space (*chronos*), the essential characteristics of the world, by qualifying them anew as the time and space of Jesus" (*kairos*)⁸. For everyone who has faith in him these are "the times (*kairoi*) of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19-21).

Thus time that was just a chronological point or entity has been transformed into a christic reality. What was indifferent in itself has become decisive for the bad or the good of man depending on his response to the offer of salvation. In this sense we may affirm that our life stands under the claim of divine *kairos*. It is the ever present "now" (*nyni*) of God's revelation (Acts 17:30), "the present time" of righteousness for one who puts his faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

8. Brown, C., N. T. Theology III (Exeter 1978) 837; the citation is from Fuchs, E., *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, I, 1959, 19

"The present time" thus is "the time (*chronos*) of restoration" (Acts 1:6), a time in which both the Jews and Gentiles shall receive the Spirit (1:7-8). Luke here becomes the spokesman of a new age, and thus expresses "a new relationship to this world in which, by God's inscrutable will, the Christians must continue to live"⁹. This is the time (*chronos*) of all "the realisation of all the promises which is at the same time a restoration of the original order of creation"¹⁰.

Thus by the terms used to denote time and seasons, the author of Acts is careful to point out that the times in which we live, as is the space, are far from bad or unholy or secular, but on the contrary, good and holy and sacred since they are stamped with Christ himself.

Wealth is good

There are in the N. T. a number of terms which are used to denote wealth and money, property and possessions. Normally three general words are in vogue to describe property and possessions as something necessary for and useful to life. The term *chrema*, (cf Mk 10:23; Lk 18:24; Acts 4:37; 8:18 etc) is used to denote money, wealth, or riches in a general sense without any pejorative connotations. The same is true of the word *ktema* (cf Mt 19:22; Mk 10:22; Acts 2:45; 5:1) which means specifically possessions and property, and sometimes used also in the sense of landed property. The term *hyparxis* (cf Acts 2:45; Heb 10:34) and *ta hyparchonta* (cf Mt 19:21; Lk 12:15; 14:33; Acts 4:32) are used interchangeably and together with each other (cf Acts 4:34) to mean property or also possessions.

All these words are found in the N.T. without any negative implications. Money, riches, wealth, property or possessions are in themselves not considered evil. It is the inordinate attachment to them and the anti-social amassing of them to the detriment of the values of the Kingdom together with the exploitation of the underdogs and the

9. Haenchen, E., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford 1982) 143

10. id, *ibid.* 208; cf also Oepke, A., TDNT I: 391-392

marginalised that come in for a strong criticism and condemnation (cf Lk 6:24; 9:25; 14:33; 18:22-30; Act 5:1-11 etc)¹¹.

But the case is not so with regard to the use of the *mamonas*¹². Although the term seems to be used in a very neutral sense in the Mishnah (Aboth 2:12) the Babylonian Talmud (Berakoth 61b), the Palestinian Talmud (Nazir 5:4:54b:12) etc signifying money, profit, cattle (wealth of the farmer), possessions or anything that has a value equivalent to money or all that a man possesses apart from his body and life, yet it acquired a negative connotation implying possessions which were dishonestly gained or money and wealth used improperly, as in bribery etc¹³.

This term occurs in the N. T. only four times (Mt 6:24 Lk 16:9-11-13) of which twice it is associated with an unholy comrade (Lk 16:9-11)¹⁴. It is called "tainted money" because its acquisition often involves dubious methods and dishonest practices. Since great wealth is rarely acquired without some malpractices money itself is associated with this characteristic note. It is further personified as a master equal to God and claiming the adhesion of the possessor to himself (cf Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13).

Luke who has used this term thrice in his Gospel in the context of the crafty steward (16:1-8), seems deliberately to avoid using it in the Acts. Even in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), where it was very opportune for him to use this term in order to bring out the malice of the couple, he avoids it purposefully since money and wealth, property and possessions in the early Church had acquired a new meaning in the building up of the *koinonia* of the early christians (cf Acts 2:44-47;

11. In Acts the term *chrema* is used in 4:37; 8:18-20; 24:26; *ktema* in 2:45; 5:1; *hyparxis* in 2:45; and *ta hyparchonta* in 4:32

12. Hauck, F., *Mamonas* TDNT IV, 388. Probably the term takes its origin from *aman* as "that in which one trusts".

13. Brown, C., *Dictionary of N. T. Theology*: II (Exeter 1971) 836-838

14. The term used with *mamonas* is *adikia*. RSV translates the phrase as *unrighteous mammon*, and JB as *tainted money* and both NEB and GNB as *worldly wealth*.

4:32-37; 11:27-30). The *ktema* (2:45; 5:1); *chrema* (4:37) *hyparxis* (2:45) and *ta hyparchonta* (4:32) etc. seem to have been always viewed in the context of and in conjunction with the nascent community's growth in *togetherness* (2:44; 4:32), selfless sharing and *distribution* to the needy (2:45-46; 4:34-35), *freedom* from undue attachment (4:35-37; 11:30) and *diakonia* to the suffering brethren (11:29). Thus property and wealth have assumed a new meaning in the Acts. In itself possession is viewed not merely as a neutral reality but as a positive agent in the building up of the community, depending only on how it is put to use.

Together with the term *mamonas* Lk also avoids the use of *plousios* and its cognates in the Acts, though he makes a liberal use of them in the Gospel¹⁵. One who is enslaved by the present age and its deceitful riches has delivered himself up to the deceptive power of wealth. This is the rich man who in his attempt to secure the present has lost the future.

If money that is acquired in dubious ways (*mamonas*) is anathema to the early community, money that enslaved one to the pleasures of the world (cf *ploutos*: Mt 13:22; Mk 4:19; Eph 4:22) is also an abomination. If the use of this term was going to make one suspicious of money and wealth as something harmful, Lk would avoid using it in the Acts, as he did in the case of *mamonas*.

In fact there seems to be a close connection between "tainted money" (Lk 16:9-11) and "the delight in riches" (Mt 13:33; Mk 4:19). No wonder then the use of both is shunned in the Acts.

We may also mention here in passing that the terms "avarice", "avaricious" etc¹⁶ do not find a place in the Acts, though Lk uses the terms "avaricious" in the Gospel

15. The term *plousios* meaning rich, or a rich man is found in Lk 6:24; 12:16; 14:12; 16:1-19-21-22; 18:23-25; 19:2; 21:1; *ploutos* meaning wealth or riches is found in 8:14; *plouteo* meaning to be rich, to become rich is found in 1:53; 12:21.

16. Cf, *philargyros* (avaricious: Lk 16:14; II Tim 3.2), and *philargyria* (avarice: I Tim 6:10).

(16:14). The reason once again is not far to seek. The author of the Acts has once and for all decided not to use terms pertaining to money and wealth, property and possessions⁵ in a negative sense or with a pejorative connotation!

Work is good

In an age of computer technology, when manual work is considered something demeaning, ignoble and menial, the words of Paul as narrated in the Acts (20:34) may give us an inkling into the mind of the author of the Acts, with regard to any work, especially manual. Paul insisted on working with his hands for his living inspite of the fact that as a preacher of the Good News he had a right to be supported by the faithful. It is the same Paul who has told us in another context, "we labour, working with our own hands" (I Cor 4:12). That Lk is in agreement with his companion in labour needs no labouring to be proved! By the very term Lk uses here, namely, *hypereteo* (Acts 20:34) which could mean both "to work" and "to serve", he seems to imply that work is a means of service which one renders to himself and to the neighbour (20:35) and at the same time it keeps one away from avarice and covetousness towards the goods of the neighbour (20:33). Thus manual labour¹⁷ both keeps one off from mischief and at the same time affirms the dignity of selfrespect and freedom to support oneself and last, not least, is also a means by which to help the weak and those in need. Physical labour has thus not merely a personal dimension but also societal (cf 20:35; Eph 4:28). Once again Lk stands out as a man of positive approach to worldly realities. His presentation of Paul as a tireless preacher of the Good News does not stop him from portraying the same Paul as one who was not afraid to soil his hands with hard and tiresome labour.

People are good

Our interest in this major section here devolves around

17. It is good to remember that both in Acts 20:34 and I Cor 4:12 what is intended is working with hands namely soiling one's hands in hard and daily drudgery (cf Paul himself was a tent-maker) through physical labour.

two categories of people, namely, the *women* and the *Gentiles*, who were for all practical purposes considered by the Jews as scum or refuse of the society, the former trapped in the home circle and the latter estranged in the wider society.

Being under the strong influence of the patriarchal system the Jews could not but relegate women to the last rung of the ladder. The woman's status was largely that of subordination to her father or her husband¹⁸. This situation gave rise to a certain negative attitude towards women in Jewish society so much so that sin and death are squarely put in her bosom (cf Eccles 25:24)¹⁹.

Although the N. T. does not differ radically from the O. T. with regard to the concept of women and womanhood, yet the attitude of Jesus and later of Lk (both in the Gospel and in the Acts) set an entirely different trend in estimating the role of women in society.

Limiting ourselves to the Lukan treatises we may not fail to notice a distinctively different, and we may say radical, approach that Luke takes with regard to women. In his Gospel which is also titled "the Gospel for women" or 'the Gospel of women' Lk lets in the women to parade in colourful procession the whole Gospel, from the first page to the last²⁰. As in the Gospel, so in the Acts too, in the beginning of the history of the Church there are women who adorn its first pages (cf Acts 1:4) as also the last (cf 24:24 — Drusilla the Jewish wife of Felix the Governor; 25:13-23: 26:30 — Bernice the daughter of king Agrippa).

18. In a number of texts in Gen (4:24-25; 3:8-17; 4:1-17 etc) "wife signifies "a woman belonging to a man". This is also due to a popular etymology of the Hebrew *ish* (man) and *isha* (woman) as expressed in Gen 2:23, which leads one to think of the latter as dependent on the former.

19. See Eccles 26:7; 42:12-14; Mic 7:5. Prov 9:13; 11:22; 25:24; I Tim 2:14-15 etc.

20. Elisabeth and Mary dominate the first chapter; Mary Magdalene and the other women play a significant role in the last. In between there are single women and groups, rich and poor, widows and family women who are displayed almost in every page of the Gospel

In both, women and womanhood appear in all their rich splendour and colour. There are women who have a name and fame in both (cf Elisabeth, Mary, Mary Magdalene etc. in the Gospels; Lydia, Priscilla, Mary the mother of John Mark etc in the Acts). There are women who remain anonymous in both (cf the woman sinner and the woman with a haemorrhage in the Gospel; women in the group of Apostles waiting for the Holy Spirit, the women who were listening to Paul at Philippi in the Acts). There are women who bear witness as prophetesses in both (cf Prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel in the Gospel; the four daughters of Philip who prophesied, as is narrated in the Acts). There are widows who play their role in both (cf Anna, the widow of Nain in the Gospel; the Hellenist and Hebrew widows in the Acts). There is a display of family women in both (cf the women accompanying Jesus, Martha and Mary as presented in the Gospel; Priscilla, Bernice, Drusilla as portrayed in the Acts). That Lk was not merely not averse to women but allowed them to walk in the company of the Lord and help in the development and growth of the early Church is proved from the fact that he uses the term *gyne* (which means woman) 39 times in his Gospel and 19 times in the Acts²¹.

In the Acts the women are associated with the whole movement of the Spirit that takes the Church from the narrow confines of Judaism to the broad environs of the Gentile world. The women are there in the upper room at the vital moment of the Church, when with the power of the Holy Spirit she would be launched off (Acts 1:14) into the wider world. If there was a woman (Sapphira) "who lied to the Holy Spirit" it was simply to show that both man (Ananias) and woman were involved in the sin of deceit (5:1-11)²². Women follow their husbands even to

21. The term *gyne* and associates are used 30 times in Mt; 16 times in Mk and 22 times in John

22. Surely Lk's aim here is not to disparage the woman, but simply to point out the way of the world where wives follow suit to connive with their husbands in doing evil

prison for the sake of "the way" (8:3; 9:2). Women are as enthusiastic in listening to the "Good News" as men (8:12). There are women who were apparently held in high esteem not only because of their high class provenance but due to their goodness and piety (13:50)²³ as for example a Jewish woman named Eunice (cf 2 Tim 1:5), the mother of Timothy, known for her profound faith (Acts 16:1); women of Macedonia who enjoyed singular freedom and found at the riverside the customary place of Jewish prayer etc. (16:13). Among them stands out Lydia²⁴ a woman of high status and yet "a worshipper of God" (16:14). There are also leading women from Thessalonica who not only believed in the Good News, but consorted themselves with Paul and Silas in their mission (17:4). Once again there are rich and high class women of Beroea who are Greeks, portrayed as accepting the faith proclaimed by Paul and Silas (17:12)²⁵. Even in Athens where no permanent impression was made by Paul on the learned Athenians, we are presented with a certain woman named Damaris, who is otherwise unknown, but yet she becomes important for Lk to be mentioned as a companion-convert with the famous Dionysius the Areopagite, who later became the first Bishop of Athens (17:34)²⁶. Lk will now portray a colourful Jewish couple, widely travelled and held in great esteem in the early Church (18:2). The fact that they are mentioned together thrice in the Acts of the Apostles (18:2, 18:26) and thrice elsewhere in Paul (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19), and most of the times the name of Priscilla preceding that of her husband Aquila (cf Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19), we may safely presume that this Jewish couple lived a

23. The term *deionotomoi* used here means "God-fearers". In the Acts, it often refers to non-Jews who were well disposed towards Judaism and who took part in the synagogue worship.

24. Lydia may well be a person of some importance. The Lydians, a woman from the country of Lydia).

25. In all three cases (18:12; 18:24; 18:26) Lk would use to refer to a woman who is highly respected. She comes up in the first episode of the chapter where she was "Greek" and the part of the second episode of Lk is clearly women of the same type (18:26).

26. Cf. Eusebius, Church History, III.4.11; IV. 23.3

model christian family life and that Priscilla played an important role in the early Church. The fact that together with her husband she "expounded to Apollos the way of God more accurately" (18:26) makes us safely assume that she could merit the title of "the woman theologian of the Early Church"²⁷. As Paul is on his way to Caesarea, not merely the men of Tyre but the womenfolk as well together with the children come to bid him goodbye (21:5). Lk is very particular not to leave out the women in important scenes, as we shall see a little later, when he narrates Paul's conversion he also mentions the women who were not second to men in laying down their lives for 'the way' (22:4). The Acts of the Apostles is brought to a close with two famous women, Drusilla the Jewish wife of Felix the Governor (24:24) and lastly Bernice the sister of king Agrippa II (25:13-23; 26:30).

Thus throughout the Acts the intention of Lk seems to be to present countless number of women, rich and poor, those with a name and without name, family women and widows, young and old, Jewish and otherwise - all in the service of the growth and spread of the Church. They are as much (and even more) a part of the Church as the menfolk. This way of looking at women could only come from a man who had consistently portrayed women in his Gospel as constant followers of Jesus in his ministry (Lk 8:1-3), during his passion (23:27-31), at his death on the cross (23:39), found by his sepulchre (23:54-56) and being made witnesses of his resurrection (24:1-12). If Lk had written "the Gospel of women" with a soft corner in his heart for them, may we not hazard a guess that he who had presented women in close touch with Jesus in the Gospel, is also intentionally portraying them in close touch with the nascent Church as is portrayed in the Acts and in that way has given a radical shift to the position of women in the world of his contemporaries! In all this Lk has been only true to his self - an evangelist of women!

27. She is known in the Epistles as Prisca. Harnack even went to the extent of suggesting her as a possible candidate for the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews !!

In one word, for Lk, women are not objects or things to be subservient to the good will and pleasure of men, but human beings gifted with goodness and charm, sensitivity and sacrality.

Lastly the "sacred-secular" dichotomy was strongly expressed for the Jews in their conceiving the world as being composed of by two irreconcilable opposites, "the Jews and the Gentiles". The Israelites have had to guard themselves from "the abominations of the Gentiles" (cf I Kgs 14:24; II Kgs 16:3 etc)²⁸. Rabbinic Judaism is hard in its judgement against the Gentiles. They are strangers to God and hence they count for nothing²⁹. They have become slaves to all kinds of passions and vices. Hence not only they are unclean but also their wives and children, their possessions, their lands and their houses³⁰. In spite of the proselytising activity of the Jews among the Gentiles³¹, the hatred and antagonism which they showed against the Gentiles were in no way modified or minimized. The general tendency in the N. T. times was certainly one of hostility.

But in spite of this common Jewish aversion to the Gentiles prevailing at the time, the Acts in general presents a positive picture of the Gentiles.

In the very composition and structure of the Acts, the author gives us [an inkling into his attitude towards the Gentiles³². If we take, as is accepted among almost all

28. Israel considered the Gentiles as idolaters, and idolatry is naturally the abomination against YHWH,

29. Str-Bill III:185 "Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai said: God spoke to Israelites: I am God over all men who come into the world; but my name I have joined only to you. I am called not the God of the Gentiles but the God of Israel" (Ex R 29:88 d).

30. Str-Bill I:540 "The land of the Gentiles is unclean. Hence also their water-ponds, their cities and their roads". (T Miq v 6, 1); cf also Str-Bill II:838; IV:374 etc.

31. Cf. Josephus, Antiquities 20, 2, 4; Philo, Vita Mose 2, 4, 7 etc.

32. The terms *ethne* and *ethnos* are used 12 times in the Third Gospel and 43 times in Acts. Out of the 12 times in the Gospel, 10 times the words refer only to the Gentiles; out of the 43 times in the Acts 37 times they refer to the Gentiles

scholars, that Lk is the author of both the third Gospel and the Acts, and if we may think of both these as two parts of one book, then the positive attitude the author takes towards the Gentiles is patently manifested in the compositional technique he uses in the construction of both these books.

If we leave out the Infancy Narratives³³, the partiality of Lk for the Gentiles or Lk's universalism is manifested in the fact that he completes Mk's citation of Is 40:3-5 (cf Mk 1:2-3) by including the promise that *all flesh*³⁴ shall see the *salvation* of God (Lk 3:4-6). If the Gospel begins with this grand open-arm policy towards "all flesh" (including the Gentiles), the Acts closes with the same policy towards the Gentiles, in the words, "Let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" (Acts 28:28). The parallelism is striking in these two instances:

"All flesh shall see the salvation of God"

"The Gentiles shall listen to the salvation of God."
Thus both in the introduction and in the conclusion of his two-parts-book Lk makes it more than clear that the Gentiles play an important role in the plan of salvation.

It is also not surprising to see that when Lk wants to establish a link between his two books, the passage of transition from the one to the other is also built on the basis of the Gentiles. While the Gospel ends with the words "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name *to all nations*" (24:47), the Acts begin with the words, "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and *to the end of the earth*" (1:8)³⁵. Both these expressions ('all nations'; 'end of the earth')

33. Even in the Infancy Narratives Gentiles are mentioned recipients of salvation together with the Jews (Lk 2:30-32)

34. "All flesh" denotes every one - Jew and Gentile - included in God's saving work

35. In both Lk 24:47 and Acts 1:8, the terms used may be different (in the Gospel *ta ethne*; in Acts *eschatou tes ges*) but they are all-inclusive terms embracing everyone - Jew, Gentile or any other !!! They are not just geographical but religious terms (cf Acts 13:46-47) used parallelly

leave us in no doubt with regard to the pride of place the Gentiles are given in both these Lukan writings.

If one now looks at the content of the Acts there are ample proofs to show that for the author of Acts the Gentiles are no more "fuel for fire", the pariah dogs that need to crouch around the table for the leftovers of children (cf Mk 7:24-30), but rather they are part of the plan of God, loved by him and chosen by him as much as also the Jews were chosen.

The assertion, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15) is a strong warning³⁶ "sounded against the tendency to separate things and call some of them 'sacred' and some 'secular'³⁷. In fact in the whole of the Acts this is the most crucial sentence where through the mouth of God himself the author strikes home the truth that the distinction between what is "sacred" and what is "secular" is absolutely false.

It is imperative to note here that as the distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' is waived with regard to 'clean' and 'unclean' food, by the same stroke the separation between 'Jew' and 'Gentile' also is thrown overboard. Repeated assertions by the author of the Acts affirm this conclusion in a most convincing manner.

As soon as he entered the house of Cornelius, Peter is made to exclaim, "God has shown me that I should not call *any man* common or unclean" (10:28). This theme is carried through in a more positive way once Peter hears Cornelius narrate the vision that he had. "Truly, says Peter, I perceive that God shows *no partiality*; but *in every nation* anyone who fears him and does what is right is *acceptable to him* (10:34-35).

As "the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (10:44), while the so-called 'sacreds' wondered at the so-

36. The warning is said to come from God himself. Besides, the fact that it is repeated 3 times impresses on us the importance of this passage (10:15; 11:9)

37. Buttrick, G.A., (ed) The Interpreter's Bible, vol IX (N. Y. 1954) 136-137

called 'seculars' since 'the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even on the Gentiles*' (10:45), once again Peter puts the 'secular' and the 'sacred' on the same scale asserting, 'can anyone forbid water for baptising *these people* who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we have*'? (10:47) Surely the 'sacreds' must have been brought to their knees!!

Later in Jerusalem before the hard-core 'sacreds; (members of the circumcision party), Peter once again affirms his stand, which is naturally God's own, in the words, 'If then God gave the same gift *to them as he gave to us....* who was I (we may add, 'and who are you?') to withstand God?' (11:17) The cryptic sentence 'when they heard this, they were silenced' (11:18) brings the 'sacreds' to their senses and makes them admit, although grudgingly 'then *to the Gentiles* also God has granted repentance unto life!' (11:18)

Not only from the mouth of Peter but also from the witness of the early Christian missionaries (one of them being Stephen the deacon), the author of the Acts once again breaks down the division of the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. As these men were preaching the Lord Jesus to *the Greeks* of Antioch, the author adds, as an aside, 'the hand of the Lord was with them' (11:21). It is interesting to note that the term *Christians* was for the first time used for these "seculars" who had come to believe in the Lord (11:26)³⁸ and thus have lost their "secularity".

But then it is in ch. 15, the chapter of the First Council of the Church once and for all the author solemnly breaks down the wall of separation (cf Eph 2:11-22) between the "secular" and the "sacred" through the mouth of the head of the apostolic college (Peter) and through the head of the Jerusalem Church (James).

It is Peter who speaks first, recalling naturally the incident of Cornelius that "by my mouth the *Gentiles* should

38. The term usually used by Paul to denote the converts is *Saints* (*hagioi*). Only here in Acts 11:26 and in I Pet 4:16 they are called 'Christians' (*Christianoi*), a kind of party designation!!

hear the word of the Gospel and believe" (15:7). By repeating the words he had always uttered at the house of Cornelius (10:28, 34-35, 44:45-47) and before the circumcision party at Jerusalem (11:17-18), he rounds up his arguments by saying that "God gave them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us and he made *no distinction* between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles)" (15:8-9). Peter would conclude saying that the "status quo" of the distinction between them is abolished on the basis of faith (15:9-11), and not on the Gentiles' acceptance of circumcision. Before God in Jesus there is no more "secular" or "sacred" but every one and everything is good (cf Gen 1:4, 10, 18, 31 etc).

Finally, James 'the Lord's brother' as president of the Council (since he was the head of the local Church), delivers his judgement on the question after listening to Peter and later to Paul and Barnabas too (whose speeches are not recorded in this chapter, cf 15:12-13). The final verdict of James is summed up in the words "we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God" (15:19).

Through this "decree" the last bastion of opposition to the Gentiles was broken down. Now in Christ everyone has become "sacred". The missionary activities of Paul in the latter chapters of Acts confirm this. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither female nor male, (may we add there is neither *sacred* nor *secular*); for you are all one in Christ" (Gal 3:25-28).

Thus the author of the Acts who portrays the new age in Christ does not hesitate to demythologize the separation of the sacred from the secular. In this way he not only takes us back to the First Book of the Bible where we are repeatedly told that everything God created was good, (cf Gen 1) but also takes us forward to the Last Book of the Bible where we are brought to witness "the new heaven and the new earth" (Rev 21:1) where "there shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him they shall see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:3-4).

It is to the credit of the author of the Acts that he has rung out the death-knell on the sacred-secular dichotomy and rung in the joyous bells of a sacralized secularity.

Book - Review

Joseph Pathrapankal, CMI. *Critical and Creative: Studies in Bible and Theology*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore-560 029, 1986, 179 pages, Rs. 38

Today's theology has assumed a liberation role. In order to make it successful, theologians have a greater responsibility to liberate theology from the realm of dogmatics and mere speculation. The book, *Critical and Creative*, is a collection of studies in Bible and Theology. The very title points out its prophetic implications. The author's thrust in these studies is the result of his deep concern for the Church of our times, which is expressed in offering his inspiring reflections on various current themes challenging every honest christian today. He understands theology as the living and critical experience and reflection of a believing community. The encounter with the Word of God and sensitivity to our Indian context and to that of the world at large make the reading more enjoyable, because the author himself communicates a similar experience. At the end the reader feels obliged to communicate these reflections to others, specially at a time when all of us are involved in meaningful dialogues leading to true conversion of the heart so as to evoke in them the prophetic spirit to be critical and creative, thus contributing to a meaningful living.

Raja Rao